



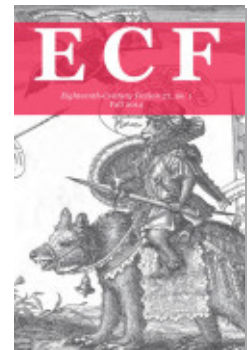
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On Sterne's Page: Spatial Layout, Spatial Form, and Social Spaces in *Tristram Shandy*

Christopher Fanning

Since the time of its first publication, readers of *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) have struggled to account for its oddities of appearance and narrative method. Its lack of conventional novelistic form has caused critics to wonder whether *Tristram Shandy* is a “novel” or rather some variety of philosophical commentary or anatomical satire. One answer to the problem of generic coherence has been to follow Tristram’s own suggestion that he “must go along with you to the end of the work.”¹ Following Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, one recurrent focus of criticism has been the sense of the narrator’s presence as the unifying principle of the work. Part of what ultimately obviates the need for strict generic definitions is the way in which Tristram, as Booth phrases it, “has ceased here to be distinguishable from what he relates.”² Sterne’s unique integration

1 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman: The Text*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 2 vols, Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), 6:20, 534. References are to the original volume and chapter numbers, followed by the page number in the Florida edition.

2 Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 223. According to Booth, the secret of *Tristram Shandy*’s “coherence, its form, seems to reside primarily in the role played by the teller, by Tristram, the dramatized narrator. He is himself in some way the central subject holding together materials which, were it not for his scatterbrained presence, would never have seemed to be separated in the first place” (p. 222).

of the sense of the narrator's presence into the formal structure of the narrative has had important implications for the history of narrative. Only recently, however, with renewed interest in the print culture of the era, has a further extension of this integration become apparent. A consideration of Sterne's attention to the physical material of the book in relation to questions of narrative presence in *Tristram Shandy* has become necessary.

This essay will inquire into Sterne's use of three different ideas of "space" in *Tristram Shandy*: the space found in the fictional world, in fictional technique, and in printing. The first two ideas of space—the mimetic and the formal—are customary ways of considering "fiction and space." Both critical approaches employ space as a metaphor. One of the ways of interpreting a novel is to consider the mimetic spaces of fiction—the spaces of the fictional world that characters inhabit—as metaphors for its thematic concerns. In eighteenth-century fiction, obvious examples of this variety of space range from the enclosed, claustrophobic spaces of *Clarissa* to the freedom of the open road in *Tom Jones*, each having a metaphoric correlative in our ideas of the private and the public, the realms of thought and of action. A similar range is found in *Tristram Shandy*: the spatial separation of the men conversing in the parlour from Mrs Shandy and the midwife who are labouring over Tristram's birth in the bedroom above correlates with the separate spheres of male and female activity that are themselves figures for satiric distinctions between theory and practice; Tristram's journey through France in volume 7 is a spatially enacted metaphoric flight from death.

At the same time that mimetic space has metaphoric meaning in a work of fiction, the form of that work is often discussed in terms of a metaphor of abstract discursive "space" that helps to articulate the manipulation of narrative sequence. This is a formal concern with the way in which the narrative is ordered. For example, when simultaneous events are placed into linear language, sequence is fragmented and narrative is said to have been "spatialized." Similarly, "spatial form" is at work when motifs or images demand interconnections that thwart the supposedly sequential flow of language (syntax or narrative).³ *Tristram Shandy* has long been recognized as a masterpiece of spatial form, especially in its representation of time.⁴ Indeed, since the eighteenth century, most of the criticism interested in the odd form of Sterne's work has been an attempt to account for

3 The classic account is Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945), reprinted in *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 3–62.

4 See, for example, Jeffrey R. Smitten, "Tristram Shandy and Spatial Form," *Ariel* 8.4 (1977), 43–55; K.G. Simpson, "At This Moment in Space: Time, Space and Values in *Tristram Shandy*," in

“the whole narration always going backwards,” as one eighteenth-century reader, Horace Walpole, put it.⁵

Although Sterne's fiction is remarkable for its combination of the formal and mimetic senses of space, neither the abstract conception of spatial form as a metaphoric representation of time nor the mimetic rendering of the spaces inhabited by the fictional characters shows the extent of his use of “space” in *Tristram Shandy*, for he is deeply engaged in problematizing reading by means of the space literally upon and between the pages of his printed text: its *mise en page*, the spatial layout of the text.⁶ Despite Sterne's expressed desire to read the newly completed volume 3 of *Tristram Shandy* aloud,⁷ oral readers of *Tristram Shandy* must encounter many moments at which they must either gloss over or describe inexpressible marks on the page, such as asterisks, dashes, and squiggles, or make a decision about what to read next: for example, either the Latin or the facing translation of Ernulphus's curse (3:11, 202–11) or “Slawkenburgius's Tale” (4, 288–99). One wonders how Sterne intended to navigate the oddities of punctuation and layout found in the volume he wished to read aloud, especially the marbled page (3:36, 269–70). *Tristram Shandy* is a visual text that problematizes the conventions of oral delivery (a mode presupposing a temporal rather than a spatial orientation). Sterne's work draws attention to *mise en page*, a unique aspect of textuality that employs a notion of “space” which differs from customary uses of that term in the criticism of fiction.

Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries, ed. Valerie Grosvenor Myer (London: Vision; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1984), pp. 142–58; A.A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), pp. 158–99; Jean-Jacques Mayoux, “Variations on the Time-Sense in *Tristram Shandy*,” in *The Winged Skull: Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference*, ed. Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1971), pp. 3–18; and William Freedman, *Laurence Sterne and the Origins of the Musical Novel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), pp. 52–86.

5 Horace Walpole, letter of 4 April 1760, quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 55.

6 Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), especially chap. 5, “Print, Space and Closure,” and chap. 6, “Oral Memory, the Story Line and Characterization,” provides a useful survey of the issues with which this essay is engaged. Peter J. De Voogd's “*Tristram Shandy* as Aesthetic Object,” *Word and Image* 4:1 (1988), 383–91, contains useful and suggestive comments, well illustrated, on the importance of the printed appearance of *Tristram Shandy* in the first editions.

7 “I have just finished one volume of Shandy, and I want to read it to some one who I know can taste and relish humour,” *Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935), 3 August 1760, p. 120. References are to this edition.

It has long been established that Sterne was very particular about the printed presentation of his work.⁸ This is clear in Sterne's letter to the first publisher of *Tristram Shandy*, Robert Dodsley:

I propose ... to print a lean edition, in two small volumes, of the size of *Rasselas*, and on the same paper and type. ... The book shall be printed here, and the impression sent up to you; for as I live at York, and shall correct every proof myself, it shall go perfect into the world, and be printed in so creditable a way as to paper, type, &c., as to do no dishonour to you. (*Letters*, pp. 80–81)

Earlier that same year, in a jocoserious letter to the printer appended to *A Political Romance*, his first fictional work, Sterne makes clear the importance of the minutiae of the text: "I have only to add ... That, at your Peril, you do not presume to alter or transpose one Word, nor rectify one false Spelling, nor so much as add or diminish one Comma or Tittle, in or to my *Romance*" (*Letters*, p. 68).⁹ This clear injunction to heed the minute particulars, the accidentals of the text, should concern readers as well as printers. In *Tristram Shandy*, such references to the printed appearance of the text intrude upon the narrative itself, reminding us that we are reading a printed artifact and that no simple translation from the text to an idealized oral communication is possible. Rather, we must read Sterne's print both as a text of mimetic verbal referents and as a non-verbal object that communicates by means of its manipulation of the space on the page. My particular interests here are to examine Sterne's use of space to represent not just this double imperative of written language, but

8 For a concise summary of Sterne's engagement with the printing process, see De Voogd, p. 383. Further work needs to be done on the relationships between Sterne's few surviving manuscripts and his printed text. My argument follows Gardner Stout's analysis of extant MSS of *A Sentimental Journey*, which concludes, cautiously, that Sterne's final intentions are represented in the *printed* version, which reflects substantive and accidental revisions made in proof. See *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*, ed. Gardner D. Stout, Jr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 49–57. Melvyn New's analysis of a MS (possibly in Sterne's hand) of the Le Fever episode stresses compositional alterations accepted only tacitly by Sterne, suggesting that the MS has greater visual presence. See "A Manuscript of the Le Fever Episode in *Tristram Shandy*," *Scriblerian* 23.2 (1991), 165–74. Unfortunately, the two extant sermon manuscripts correspond to sermons printed posthumously (numbers 28 and 37), and, therefore, cannot reveal Sterne's intentions for print. On the one hand, a comparison of the MS for sermon 37 (Pierpont Morgan Library, MA 418) with its printed version reveals that many dashes were added by the printer according to a regularized Shandean style. On the other hand, it is worth noting that, unlike the sermons seen through the press by Sterne himself, in those posthumously published the dash lengths do not vary: surely an indication of Sterne's involvement at the printing stage consistent with the more famous printed features of *Tristram Shandy* such as the black and marbled pages, or the missing chapter.

9 Sterne's attention to minutiae did not diminish: there is evidence that, in 1767, he requested changes to the lengths of the dashes in vols 5 and 6. See Melvyn New, Introduction, Florida Edition (pp. 835–37).

also an aspect of communication that falls between these two poles, the most ambiguous non-verbal aspect of orality: silence.



The place to begin an examination of Sterne's treatment of silence is his work in a genre specifically designed for oral delivery, the sermon. Sterne's sermons also provide a relatively clear preliminary to the consideration of space in *Tristram Shandy*, for in the sermons the relationship between spatial layout and the silences of orality is uncomplicated by the narrative concerns of representing the topographical space in which characters exist. Of course, as with all things Sternean, such simplicity is accompanied by interesting problems. In the case of the sermons, we encounter a printed version which was *directly influenced* by the printed aesthetic of *Tristram Shandy*. Although Sterne's sermons represent twenty years of pulpit experience prior to the publication of *Tristram Shandy*, as far as their printed presentation is concerned, *Tristram Shandy* is as much an introduction to the sermons as the reverse, for Sterne revised his sermons and prepared them for the press in 1760 and 1766 *after* the publication of *Tristram Shandy*. The sermons in their printed form are remarkably—and intentionally—Shandean in appearance: *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* share the same size and type, generously made spacious with a small number of lines per page, a double space between paragraphs, wide margins, and dashes of varying length.¹⁰ The mutual influence of the *Sermons* and *Tristram Shandy* (the former written and orally delivered before the latter, yet laid out in print after) makes the sermons an interesting ground to explore the relationship of oral and visual.¹¹

Sterne's sermons are by no means simple transcripts of his orations. In examining the role of space and the dash in the printed sermons and their relation to oral delivery, we are tracing Sterne's thematic interest in problems

10 The evidence for sermons printed before *Tristram Shandy* is slender. Two of Sterne's sermons (numbers 5 and 27) were published individually in 1747 and 1750. These show intimations of the Shandean presentation with some use of varying dash lengths. The text of these early versions is on the whole less spacious than their later printings. Although there is double spacing between paragraphs, there are more lines per page (26 compared to 21 in 1760 and 19 in 1766) and less space within each line. A convenient comparison is Kenneth Monkman's facsimile of *A Political Romance* (Menston, England: Scolar, 1971), originally printed by Caesar Ward, printer of the two early sermons.

11 Appearances alone are not the only reason to consider the sermons as a way of understanding *Tristram Shandy*, for there is evidence to suggest that Sterne saw the sermons as dialogic companions to *Tristram Shandy*, designed to "keep up a kind of balance, in my shandaic character" (*Letters*, p. 252).

of communication: speech, silence, and graphological representation. Ultimately, we are inquiring into the meaning of the Shandean style. The sermon, as an oral genre, is in need of some kind of translation into its printed form—no mere transcript will convey the rhetorical impact of the preacher’s presence. Having already begun to employ *mise en page* to the end of creating presence in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne takes advantage of the same technique to supplement the preacher’s absence with an architecture of the printed page that speaks eloquently not only as a translation of the oral delivery (now lost) but also as a statement in itself. Many of his sermons, such as “Hezekiah and the Messengers” (sermon 17), are openly concerned with the problems of rhetoric, the lamentable need for a medium, such as the preacher himself, in order to communicate with God.¹² In sermon 17, Sterne laments his mediating role as a preacher and expresses a wish to be unnecessary, ultimately retreating into silence in the face of merely noisy rhetoric. Here it is not surprising to see the printed page enact some kind of non-verbal communication. In the first edition of this sermon, the final page has the appearance of an hourglass (see figure 1). The blocks of print visually enact the collapse of discourse there under discussion. The first paragraph offers five lines of text, the third, ten. The second paragraph is simultaneously more and less than a paragraph. It consists of one line, centred on the page, rather than merely indented:

—it is too late.

The line is not an independent sentence, but a fragment of the preceding paragraph, which concludes with a shorter dash. The ambiguous grammatical status of this line—it is simultaneously a sentence and a paragraph, but also neither—is foregrounded by its position on the page. Out of the ashes of rhetoric’s collapse rises a new mode of communication: a silence which the preacher allows to envelop his words and which becomes visually represented by the white space surrounding the centre of this page.¹³

12 See, for example, sermons 2, 3, and 23 for considerations of the preacher’s own rhetoric, which I discuss in my article, “Sermons on Sermonizing: The Pulpit Rhetoric of Swift and Sterne,” forthcoming in *Philological Quarterly* 77:4. Also, sermons 10, 26, and 42 discuss the rhetorical style of the scriptures.

13 Sterne’s hand is apparent in the horizontal centring of the middle paragraph, although the vertical disposition of the text is likely the product of mere compositorial layout.

60 S E R M O N I I .

virtuous man who did it, with infamy;—undo it all.—I beseech you: give him back his honour,——restore the jewel you have taken from him,—replace him in the eye of the world—

——it is too late.

It is painful to utter the reproaches which should come in here.—I will trust them with yourselves: in coming from that quarter, they will more naturally produce such fruits as will not set your teeth on edge——for they will be the fruits of love and good will, to the praise of God and the happiness of the world, which I wish.

S E R-

Figure 1. *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1766), vol. 3, p. 60. Reproduced with permission of McMaster University Library.

Elsewhere in the sermons, space, in conjunction with the dash, is explicitly associated with silence. In his sermon on "Pride," the double space between paragraphs becomes itself a typographic paragraph of silence:

—Approach his bed of state—lift up the curtain—regard a moment with silence—

—are these cold hands and pale lips, all that is left of him who was canoniz'd by his own pride, or made a god of, by his flatterers?¹⁴

The role of the dash is here obviously dramatic or gestural, standing in for the actions described. Most effective here are the dashes at the end of the first paragraph of text and the beginning of the second. Just as the preceding actions are set off by dashes on either side, so is the silence granted textual status. In this sermon, this space is conveniently labelled "silence." In other sermons it is simply heard, often marked by the aposiopestic dash.¹⁵

Some sermons use white space (to some degree) and the dash (to a greater degree) in a more purely performative fashion, rather than as representations of performance. In such cases, they may not gesture at silence in itself, but rather at non-verbal actions. In "National Mercies" (sermon 21), Sterne plays on the double space between paragraphs by eliminating it when two one-line paragraphs convey simultaneous events (see figure 2):

—The blessing was necessary,—
—and it was granted.—

In the fallen world, divine *fiat*—saying into being—is not only impossible, but unrepresentable. Nevertheless, Sterne's typographical collapse of the distinction between paragraphs attempts to collapse the distinction between (or rather, to reunite) word and deed in his representation of a miracle. This performative gesture conveys the original lost unity and simultaneously recognizes it as lost (by drawing attention to the fact that, if he had printed the two phrases over each other, both would be illegible). This is a spatialized rendering of what in oral delivery would be described as parataxis.

14 Laurence Sterne, *The Sermons*, ed. Melvyn New, vol. 4, Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), sermon 24, p. 232. All references that do not appear in figures 1 and 2 are to this edition, cited by sermon and page number.

15 The best example is sermon 20, which employs the dash to represent the inadequacy of language to render the sentimental story of the prodigal son. It is also clear from the frequency with which the dash follows an exclamation that it represents a silent pause in which the exclamation may reverberate.

184 SERMON VI.

If God then made us, as he did the Israelites, suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, how much more signal was his mercy in giving them to us without money, without price, in those good days which followed, when a long and a wife reign was as necessary to build up our church, as a short one was before to save it from ruins.——

——The blessing was necessary,——
——and it was granted.——

God having multiplied the years of that renowned princefs to an uncommon number, giving her time, as well as a heart, to fix a wavering per-
cuted

[104]

it—'Tis a heavy tax upon that half of our fellow-creatures, brother *Shandy*, said my uncle *Toby*.—'Tis a piteous burden upon 'em, continued he, shaking his head.—Yes, yes, 'tis a painful thing—said my father, shaking his head too—but certainly since shaking of heads came into fashion, never did two heads shake together, in concert, from two such different springs.

God blefs } 'em all—said my uncle
Duce take } *Toby* and my father, each
to himself.

C H A P. XIII.

H O L L A !—you chairman!—here's fixpence—do step into that book-
seller's shop, and call me a *dey-tall* critick. I am very willing to give any
one

Figure 2. *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, vol. 3, p. 184. Reproduced by permission of McMaster University Library. Figure 3. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760–67), 9 vols, 4:104. Reproduced by permission of McMaster University Library.

The very need to describe the technique using the terminology of sequence points out how the printed text attempts to transcend the sequentiality of oral reading. This has its parallel in a graphic device, which defies reading aloud, used in *Tristram Shandy* to represent simultaneous utterances of the Shandy brothers in volume 4, chapter 12 (see figure 3).¹⁶

This brief survey of Sterne's sermons has described his use of spatial layout to represent non-verbal aspects of orality, aspects dependent upon the presence of the preacher. In addition to a similar use of space to convey the non-verbal in *Tristram Shandy*, we encounter greater complexity as narrative issues bring formal and mimetic spaces to the fore. Early in the novel, this is notable in the deliberate association of the formal and the mimetic metaphors of space. In a single early chapter we are informed that Tristram intends to narrate his origins *ab Ovo*, but also that what follows is not wholly relevant to his story, and the readers who "do not choose to go so far back into these things" may "skip over the remaining part of this Chapter." Tristram here gives his readers a formal directive, pertaining to the order of his narration. This is accompanied, however, by a mimetic gesture, spoken to the "curious and inquisitive" (1:4, 5) readers who choose to remain for the extended deduction of the date of Tristram's conception, that evokes a shared intimate space :

—————Shut the door.—————
(1:4, 6)

This gesture, linking the fragmentation of narrative sequence (spatial form) and the metaphoric intimacy of a private conversation (mimetic space), is a frequent one in Sterne's text. An interesting parallel occurs later in volume 1 when Tristram addresses his female reader: "How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter?" (1:20, 64). Here the intimacy of conversation is again marked by exclusion. However, rather than shutting the door, Tristram employs the formal, fictional space of the text: "as a punishment for it [inattentiveness], I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again" (1:20, 64–65). While the female reader is engaged in a separate chapter—a different space—Tristram may converse confidentially with the male reader. It is important to note that the varieties of space are so closely interwoven here that they cross over: textual distance becomes mimetic distance. This is an all-pervasive technique in *Tristram Shandy*,

16 This device is used again to represent simultaneity in vol. 7, chap. 8 and the syncopation of the abbess and novice of Andouilletts in vol. 7, chap. 25.

to the extent that the words of a narrator or character often carry both mimetic and diegetic implications, as when Tristram says of his mother, "She listened ... with composed intelligence, and would have done so to the end of the chapter" (5:13, 442): the reader cannot know whether this means "to the natural conclusion of this activity (or the events represented)" or "to the end of this chapter in the work known as *Tristram Shandy*" (see also vol. 1, chap. 10, and vol. 7, chap. 22). Furthermore, Tristram draws the reader in by enunciating a notion of reading as spatial. His intimate conversation with the male reader concerns the (female) "vicious taste" that cannot transcend a linear conception of "reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures, than of the deep erudition and knowledge" (1:20, 65). The spatial metaphor of depth contrasts the temporal sense of the "straight forwards" sequence (although we should note that many such time references are only expressed through spatial metaphors).

Another instance of the conjunction of textual and mimetic space occurs in volume 3, this time placed outdoors in the intimacy of a country walk. Again, the mimetic space, this time not the static containment of the private room but the outdoor space through which the narrator and his friend Eugenius are travelling, is linked with the spatial form of fiction that (especially with the Shandean focus on the literal form) demands cross-referencing different pages and volumes:

———Here are two senses, cried *Eugenius*, as we walk'd along, pointing with the fore finger of his right hand to the word *Crevice*, in the fifty-second page of the second volume of this book of books,—here are two senses,—quoth he.—— And here are two roads, replied I, turning short upon him,——a dirty and a clean one,——which shall we take? (3:31, 258)

Interpretation takes place by means of spatializing the text—flipping through its pages in order to locate the place in the text to be considered—but it is also subject to the road metaphor derived from the geographical space in which the interpretation occurs.

The most extended mingling of *Tristram Shandy's* mimetic time and place with textual time and place occurs in the travel metaphor of volume 7. It is this volume that most strongly brings the applications of Shandyism into the world outside of textuality, into the human considerations of life and death in space and time, something beyond a bookish game. Volume 7 begins with the metaphoric use of space ("DEATH himself knocked at my door"), interrupting another scene of intimate narration to Eugenius.

Thou hast had a narrow escape, Tristram, said Eugenius, taking hold of my hand as I finish'd my story——

But there is no *living*, Eugenius, replied I, at this rate; for as this *son of a whore* has found out my lodgings—— (7:1, 576)

What follows in volume 7 is an extended spatial metaphor asserting that life is found only in its participial form, *living*, which requires motion through space as opposed to lodgement, or stasis. As we have seen, such metaphoric uses of mimetic space are frequently linked to the spatial form of the work, as with, for example, Tristram's much-noted travels through Auxerre: "I have been getting forwards in two different journies together, and with the same dash of the pen" (7:28, 621). The insistence on the kinetic movement through space here supplies the moral framework underpinning the gestural nature of the spatial layout of both *Tristram Shandy* and *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (as well as the spatial form of *Tristram Shandy*). Just as the success of Tristram's flight from Death is marked by the change from linear flight to the choreographed peasant dance at the end of volume 7 (accompanied by a denial of "*straight lines*" in the opening of vol. 8, chap. 1, cross-referenced to vol. 6, chap. 40), Sterne's page demands a lively eye that apprehends meaning not "straight forwards," line by line from left to right, top to bottom, but in a dance that perceives the structure of the space, actively moving back and forth, in essence creating meaning by performing these actions.

We may trace the literal origins of this metaphoric dance by returning to the moment at which Tristram berates the "straight forwards" reader. Here he not only asserts the spatial form of his work (by sending "Madam" back to the previous chapter) as well as the intimate conversational space he shares with the male reader, but he also at this moment introduces a third variety of space into *Tristram Shandy*, one that shifts from the metaphoric uses of mimetic location and spatialized narrative to the performative space of the book as object. In wishing to demonstrate his "deep erudition" (1:20, 65), Tristram has recourse, for the first time in the work, to a traditional scholarly device, the footnote. The history of the footnote runs parallel to the history of printing, marking the spatial incorporation of what manuscript culture would call a marginal gloss, and oral culture a digression. As Hugh Kenner points out,

The footnote's relation to the passage from which it depends is established wholly by visual and typographic means, and will typically defeat all efforts of the speaking voice to clarify it without visual aid. Parentheses, like commas, tell the voice what to do: an asterisk tells the voice that it can do nothing. ... The language has forsaken a vocal milieu, and a context of oral communication between persons,

and commenced to take advantage of the expressive possibilities of technological space.¹⁷

No stranger to digressions (“take them out of this book for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them,” 1:22, 81), *Tristram Shandy* recognizes the problem they present to narration which is conceived of in an oral fashion, requiring the repetition of the words from which the digression began, as each digression returns to the subject, having supposedly enriched our sense of it. The footnote asks us to suspend the narration of the subject while supplementary information is supplied, employing the space on the page to mark this process rather than repetition in the text.¹⁸ Sometimes, rather than supplying new information, the footnote can also simply refer readers back to places in previous volumes (for example, a note in vol. 3, chap. 1, sends us back to vol. 2, chap. 18), drawing attention to what is known as “spatial form” (the cross-referenced fragmentation of sequence). In *Tristram Shandy*, after the gesture of “——Shut the door——” and other metafictional moments in which the reader finds himself or herself addressed in the context of mimetic space, the extra-diegetic device of the footnote, so clearly a function of the printed page, cannot occur without invoking the intimate relationship of the author and reader which has been defined by the metaphors of mimetic space. By this association, the printed text has taken on a living presence of the kind formerly thought only available within the intimate space of the lived world.

Footnotes may be called supplemental uses of space: at one level, that of metaphoric spatial form, they fill in the gaps in the narrative, or enlarge our sense of it. At the level of *mise en page*, printed in smaller type and separated from the main text, they draw the eye to the bottom of the page, providing, if one allows for the vertical orientation of the printed page, at

17 Kenner's *aperçu* continues: “The man who writes a marginal comment is conducting a dialogue with the text he is reading; but the man who composes a footnote, and sends it to the printer along with his text, has discovered among the devices of printed language something analogous with counterpoint: a way of speaking in two voices at once, or of ballasting or modifying or even bombarding with exceptions his own discourse without interrupting it. It is a step in the direction of discontinuity: of organizing blocks of discourse simultaneously in space rather than consecutively in time.” Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 39–40.

18 Printing enhances our sense of both types of supplementary information: the footnote by means of economy of type, the digression or interruption by excessive expenditure of type through repetition—as with several examples involving Trim, including the narrative of “The King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles” during the telling of which the title—formally centred on the page—is reprinted five times (8:19, 683–90). The narratological problem of attributing repetition to diegetic or mimetic levels in these and many other instances in *Tristram Shandy* needs further study.

least a two-dimensional sense of the “depth” for which Tristram strives. This type of textual supplementarity, playing on the appearance of scholarly apparatus, is characteristic of the dense textuality of Scriblerian precursors of *Tristram Shandy* such as Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* and especially Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* in which the weighty notes dominate the space of the page. Sterne is clearly borrowing from this tradition in his histrionic use of footnotes and asterisks. As we have already seen in the sermons, however, the appearance of Sterne’s page is quite different from that of Scriblerian pages. The text of *Tristram Shandy* is generously spaced (as figures 3–7 show). The celebrated dash has been said to “open up” the text rather than weigh it down.¹⁹ What Sterne has done is to take the Scriblerian models of textuality and sublimate them, drawing in their sense of performativity, yet pointing it in a different direction—not towards the opacity of language, but rather towards its ineffability. In the Scriblerian works the excessive presence of ink marks the performative text, whereas, for Sterne, with notable exceptions such as the marbled or black pages, it is the *absence* of excessive ink that enacts a performance. In other words, it is the unoccupied space on the page that produces many of the effects of *Tristram Shandy*.

Let us examine what is perhaps the novel’s most extended use of the space on the page. In the single chapter (vol. 6, chap.18) that relates the “beds of justice” conversation between Mr and Mrs Shandy, the manipulation of spatial layout to convey passing time or silence, to create activity or stasis, and to explore the relationship of repetition and meaning, is combined with one of *Tristram Shandy*’s significant social spaces (see figures 4–7). This chapter, which returns us to the scene of the bedroom, is an important one for feminist critics concerned with the frequently silent or absent Mrs Shandy.²⁰ Here we witness the source of that silence and absence at work as Mrs Shandy displays her rhetorical skills in answering Mr

19 There is critical disagreement about Sterne’s dashes, centring around their meaning in either an oral/aural or visual context. For example, Michael Vande Berg notes that the English tradition of rhetorical pointing, which sees the visual as a script or score for the aural, was still current in Sterne’s day. “‘Pictures of Pronunciation’: Typographical Travels through *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le fataliste*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21:1 (1987), 23–24. On the other hand, Roger B. Moss argues that Sterne’s punctuation forces a recognition of the disjunction of the aural and visual. “Sterne’s Punctuation,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 15:2 (1981–82), 180–81, and *passim*. Moss discusses the dash in similar terms, insisting on the unreadability of space in the novel (pp. 195–98). Yet, despite a declared interest in space, Moss discusses the dash as if its impact were identical in any context. Most critics argue that the dash opens up the text, but the nature of “text” remains undefined—it is most often an abstraction rather than the printed object. Is the spatiality created by the dash maintained in the translation of the first edition into modern forms? Or do critics discuss their *idea* of the effect of the dash, conceived apart from the page?

20 Both John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy’s World: Sterne’s Philosophical Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p. 115, and Helen Ostovich, “Reader as Hobby-Horse in *Tristram Shandy*,” *New Casebooks: The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*: Laurence Sterne, ed. Melvyn New (London: Macmillan, 1992), 164–65, see Mrs Shandy’s silence as an active rhet-

Shandy. The question under consideration is whether or not young Tristram should be put into breeches early (to compensate for the mutilation of his genitals in the accident with the window sash). Mrs Shandy's technique, employed in Shandy Hall's most cathected space, is one that we have witnessed in connection with the spatialization of narrative: silence and repetition. And here Sterne's *mise en page* reinforces Mrs Shandy's non-discursive discourse (which so frustrates Mr Shandy's attempts at logocentric dialectic) through its third alternative of visual presentation.

In the "beds of justice" chapter, Mrs Shandy is at her most rhetorical, simultaneously rejecting discourse and using it through subtle mutations—distorting echoes—of Mr Shandy's words. The mutations in Mrs Shandy's replies seem to demand an oral intonation for full effect, and, in many ways, this chapter can be read as a score annotated for performance. Let us first observe Mrs Shandy at work. As Walter strains to provoke a response with which he can engage his dialectic, she consistently fails to provide one. Instead, she mildly reduces both sense and syllables:

——I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father, who the duce he takes after.——

I cannot conceive, for my life,—said my mother.——

Or she potently concentrates:

I suppose, replied my father,—making some pause first,—he'll be exactly like other people's children.——

Exactly, said my mother.——

She amplifies (but subtly, only the first half of the sentence):

——And 'twill be lucky, if that's the worst on't, added my father.

It will be very lucky, answered my mother.

She anticipates Mr Shandy's conclusions:

——They should be of leather, said my father, turning him about again.—

They will last him, said my mother, the longest. (6:8, 526–28)

Mrs Shandy's repetitious responses thwart linear progress. However, they also help create the atmosphere of a ritual, something from the realm

orical technique. Ostovich connects the "beds of justice" conversation to Tristram's relationship with the female reader. Further references to feminist accounts of Mrs Shandy's silence appear in Ostovich's notes.

of magic that has its own value outside of Walter's "science." Thus this is a chapter that Sterne could well read aloud, applying the lessons of translating the sermons into print in reverse, reading the space on the page in order to extend the chapter beyond itself into sound.

Every paragraph in the first edition of *Tristram Shandy* is separated by a double space. This spatial arrangement helps to establish a rhythm and a pace for the chapter. Because of the short paragraphs in volume 6, chapter 18, there is extra white space on each page (the usual two and one-half first edition pages printed on a single page of a modern paperback edition become nearly three and one-half).²¹ Treating the chapter as a score for performance, the question arises: should the pages be turned more quickly, because we are receiving "less" information, or should the tempo of page turning be kept constant, and rests added to fill out the time of each page? The question is not so easily answered when one considers Sterne's careful pacing (and spacing) of his sermon-like discourses. The white space on the page is given meaning if we account for the resonance of the preacher's voice. However, this chapter is not only a means to a performance: it is, in many ways, the performance itself, a ritualized space. For the visual reader, the sermons have suggested that this chapter, which consists mainly of short exchanges of uncommunicative dialogue, presents to the eye a visual silence, a series of discrete textual islands, unbridged, a spatial metaphor for the lack of communication. The critic sensitive to social spaces will also note how this chapter enacts the uncomfortable physical relationship of Mr and Mrs Shandy as they lie together in the same bed.

In the "beds of justice" chapter, reading the white space as resonance is encouraged by the repetition in the passage—not only by Mrs Shandy, but by the text itself. Peter J. De Voogd has suggested (in the context of the arrangement of footnotes) that "catchword-order" is worthy of serious consideration as one of Sterne's techniques in *Tristram Shandy*.²² How far this should be taken is questionable, for, despite Sterne's intense interest in the printing of his work, his control over page division cannot be established. However, catchwords are an unavoidable aspect of all eighteenth-century texts, and one to which Sterne was quite sensitive: for the second edition of volumes 5 and 6, it is possible that Sterne requested the catchword be omitted whenever it read "CHAP."²³ Although catchwords were

21 This is De Voogd's way of describing the difference between the first and modern editions (p. 385). The "beds of justice" chapter averages approximately 81 words per page in contrast to about 125 per page in vols 1 and 2. Because the Florida Edition maintains the double space between paragraphs, the ratio of first edition pages to Florida pages remains consistent with the other chapters: two to one. Many of this chapter's short paragraphs, however, appear as single lines in the Florida Edition.

22 De Voogd, p. 387.

23 This is the suggestion of Monkman in appendix 5 of the Florida Edition, pp. 929, 933.

mainly a device for the convenience of printers which readers were expected to ignore, Sterne's interests—both as a preacher and the author of *Tristram Shandy*—were in drawing attention to exactly such conventions. If we pay attention to them, catchwords serve to enhance the sense of repetition throughout the text.²⁴ In the “beds of justice” chapter, the extra white space makes catchwords (and hence repetition) more frequent.²⁵ This causes a ritualizing incantatory feeling to settle over the chapter, slowing the reading. Walter's twice repeated “Humph!” (6:18, 527) appears *three* times in the first edition—if the first “Humph!”, which is the catchword (figure 4), is pronounced. Is the fact that this word is the catchword accidental? Or is it the accidental of a musical score? After all, “Humph” is an important argumentative technique in *Shandy Hall*, and it appears three times as Uncle Toby and Dr Slop argue over the “Abuses of Conscience” sermon (2:17, 149–50).

Extra white space and more frequent catchwords are mutually supporting techniques for the creation of an incantatory tone in the “beds of justice” chapter. Within the text of the chapter, Mrs Shandy's use of repetition confirms the tone conveyed by the extra-textual devices. Repetition is one of Mrs Shandy's two rhetorical techniques, the other of which is silence. Both techniques are a refusal to participate in discourse by disregarding the rules of dialectic either in the subtle mutations of what she repeats or in her failure to respond at all. That this is represented visually in the text of *Tristram Shandy* suggests that we may see this as a contribution to the debate between theory and practice which is the theme of the satire in *Tristram Shandy*. As Walter Shandy's sterile words fall upon Mrs Shandy's frustrating silence, we are made aware that opinions unsupported by life are inadequate. Just as Tristram's race through France is a spatial affirmation of life, Mrs Shandy's room-bound debate with Walter draws support from the spatial architecture of the “beds of justice” chapter, which draws upon the spatializing techniques of *Tristram Shandy* as a whole. The kinds of repetition that *Tristram Shandy* has employed elsewhere at the diegetic level as a function of digressions—the spatialized fragmentation of linear narrative—are employed by Mrs Shandy at the mimetic level to thwart Walter's linear dialectic.

24 In the dedication to vol. 1, for example, this repetition has the power to make “one” appear three: the author shall think himself “perhaps much happier than any [one] one (one only excepted).” I have supplied the catchword in square brackets.

25 Compare this chapter's ratio of 6 catchwords to its 563 words of text with, for example, the 4 catchwords and 630 words of text in vol. 2, chap. 6.

[72]

C H A P. XVIII.

WE should begin, said my father, turning himself half round in bed, and shifting his pillow a little towards my mother's, as he opened the debate.—We should begin to think, Mrs. *Shandy*, of putting this boy into breeches.—

We should so,—said my mother.—
We defer it, my dear, quoth my father, shamefully.—

I think we do, Mr. *Shandy*,—said my mother.

—Not but the child looks extremely well, said my father, in his vests and tunicks.—

—He

[73]

—He does look very well in them, —replied my mother.—

—And for that reason it would be almost a sin, added my father, to take him out of 'em.—

—It would so,—said my mother: —But indeed he is growing a very tall lad,—rejoin'd my father.

—He is very tall for his age, indeed,—said my mother.—

—I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father, who the duce he takes after.—

I cannot conceive, for my life,—said my mother.—

Humph!

Figure 4. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760–67), 9 vols, 6:72, 73. The remaining pages of chapter 18 are reproduced in figures 5, 6, and 7. *Ex bibliotheca Melvyn New.*

[75]

He will be very awkward in them at first, replied my mother:-----

-----And 'twill be lucky, if that's the worst on't, added my father.

It will be very lucky, answered my mother.

I suppose, replied my father,---making some pause first,---he'll be exactly like other people's children.-----

Exactly, said my mother.-----

-----Though I should be sorry for that, added my father: and so the debate stopped again.

-----They should be of leather, said my father, turning him about again.---
They

[74]

Humph!-----said my father.

(The dialogue ceased for a moment.)

-----I am very short myself,---continued my father, gravely.

You are very short, Mr. *Shandy*,---said my mother.

Humph! quoth my father to himself, a second time: in muttering which, he plucked his pillow a little further from my mother's,---and turning about again, there was an end of the debate for three minutes and a half.

-----When he gets these breeches made, cried my father in a higher tone, he'll look like a beast in 'em.

He

Figure 5

[76]

They will last him, said my mother, the longer.

But he can have no linings to 'em, replied my father.-----

He cannot, said my mother.

'Twere better to have them of fustian, quoth my father.

Nothing can be better, quoth my mother.-----

---Except dimity,---replied my father:---'Tis best of all,---replied my mother.

---One must not give him his death, however,---interrupted my father.

By no means, said my mother:---and so the dialogue stood still again.

I am
7

[77]

I am resolved, however, quoth my father, breaking silence the fourth time, he shall have no pockets in them.-----

---There is no occasion for any, said my mother.-----

I mean in his coat and waistcoat,---cried my father.

---I mean so too,---replied my mother.

---Though if he gets a gig or a top---Poor souls! it is a crown and a scepter to them,---they should have where to secure it.-----

Order it as you please, Mr. Standy, replied my mother.-----

-----But

Figure 6

[78]

—But don't you think it right?
added my father, pressing the point
home to her.

Perfectly, said my mother, if it pleases
you, Mr. *Shandy*.——

—There's for you! cried my father,
losing temper——Pleases me!——You
never will distinguish, Mrs. *Shandy*, nor
shall I ever teach you to do it, betwixt
a point of pleasure and a point of con-
venience.——This was on the *Sunday*
night;——and further this chapter say-
eth not.

C H A P. XIX.

AFTER my father had debated the af-
fair of the breeches with my mother,
—he consulted *Albertus Rubenius* upon
it;

Figure 7

This is a prime example of the integration of varieties of space in Sterne's fiction. Within a mimetic social space (which the reader has frequently encountered in moments of narrative self-reflexivity that draw attention to the spatial form of the work, such as the "——Shut the door.——" gesture or the "two roads" debate discussed above) a character employs devices borrowed from the work's spatializing techniques. In addition, the very physical space on the page increases the impact of the satire, offering not just a score for performance, but a performance in itself, more subtle than the obvious typographical ploys for attention that force their presence upon the reader, because it acts by means of absence, empty space.²⁶

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²⁶ I wish to thank David Richter for comments on an earlier version of this essay.