A Portrait of the (Postmodern) Artist: Intertextual Subjectivity in Tom Phillips’s A Humument

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In 1892 a minor Victorian novelist, W. H. Mallock (1849-1923), published A Human Document, a novel that recounts a passionate love affair between an unhappily married upper-class woman and an aspiring and very promising young poet-turned-foreign-service-minister who gives up all for love. The novel was successful enough to go through several editions, even making it to a one-volume edition of the usual "three-decker" format. Since then, the novel was entirely forgotten until, in 1966, British artist/poet/composer Tom Phillips purchased a copy for three pence and initiated a years-long artistic obsession with the book.

The resulting mixed-media text, A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel, is certainly to be classified as a parody, in the postmodern sense of the word, and like all such parodies, it is a repetition that does not necessarily mock or reject, but rather sets up a self-conscious, critical distance between the original and the new text, which according to Linda Hutcheon "allows ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity" ("Politics" 185). This distinction is crucial, suggesting as it does not the necessary rejection of the previous text (though this is possible), but recognition of common historical or cultural concerns. And even beyond that, it pinpoints what will be the primary focus of Phillips's text: the irony of textualized "versions" of the self.

A Humument responds to the vestigial romanticism of our own culture's obsession with "telling one's story," with creating a "textual identity"—but part of the text's playful complexity is the way it frequently reminds the reader of postmodernism's dismantling of such myths of coherence. Phillips's "treatment" of Mallock's text reveals at once his own nostalgia for the Romantic myth of love, which forms a central narrative of the novel, and also his recognition of Mallock's own awareness of the ironic impossibility of both that myth and, relatedly, the myth of the unified self. Indeed, Phillips will expose what is most surprisingly modern in Mallock's text: its "discursive self-consciousness" (McHale 165), the awareness that subjectivity is itself textual, historically contingent, and open-ended.

This portrait of an artist does more than explore, via its appropriation of the Mallock text, the irony that inherently destabilizes the myth of a unified self. Phillips's parody brings forward a "textual I" whose identity is no longer bound by any simple notion of textuality: A Humument celebrates a postmodern self-fashioning of the "self-as-artist," a figure whose identity is intertextually dynamic, whose life's text is endlessly transforming. The text, which Huston Paschal calls "a laconic journal of the artist's personal life" (17), is at once fictional and autobiographical, fundamentally anti-formalist, yet also fascinated by the way that identity or, more accurately perhaps, subjectivity is both constituted and "made legible" by
A Humument is palimpsestically intertextual. It is in a quite literal sense a revision of the novel A Human Document [3] Phillips worked his text upon actual leaves of editions of the 1892 edition; as his work on this subject has continued, he has bought up every copy of the novel that he and his friends have been able to put their hands on. The book, a sort of poetical novel, is "treated," as Phillips puts it, on a literal level through his highlighting of strings of the original text (Fig. 1) by inscribing connected "bubbles" around groups of words or letters; he describes the look of the "new" text on the page as "rivers of type," [4] flowing as they do from line to line. The rest of the original text is either obscured completely—by a drawing or design applied on top (a kind of modern "illumination," in other words), by erasure or effacement of some sort, or by being simplescut out. Just as often though it is allowed to "ghost through" as a legible (or almost legible) graphic background to the highlighted type. This text is highly "textured," layered, the original text sometimes entirely submerged, sometimes subtly emerging, sometimes jutting through the surface of the new text. This emphasizes both the materiality of the text itself—both Mallock's and his own—and also its historicity, its simultaneous access to both past and present.

The historicity of the Phillips narrative is highlighted by the very form that A Humument takes. This is evident from the opening page, the very title created by cutting out the middle syllables of the Mallock title, and pasting the fragmented words together. These techniques create immediately complex dynamics between the old narrative and the new, whereby the original text becomes at once pretext and image, a "visible language," in W. J. T. Mitchell's sense, whereby the "graphic potential" of a text is fulfilled, its "sensuous surface of the calligraphic and typographic forms" suggesting "symbolic values" ("Visible Language" 83-4). [5] Indeed, in its effacement by paint, ink, watercolor, scratching, erasure, it becomes a self-reflexive image of the historical nature of the intertextual enterprise. The text is artifact. This text highlights not merely inescapability of that past, but its very instability: both past and present are involved in ever-shifting contexts that revise both. Returning to the title once more: the word humument carries with it the sense of an "unearthing" of the past; the neologism echoes of the "human," the earthy "humus," the posthumous and "monument"-al. [6]

Phillips's text indeed finds its subject (the textual/-sexual self) and its modus operandi (the composite artistry of a kind of textual archaeology) in the original text itself. For Mallock's A Human Document is a framed narrative, itself a reconstruction, by a narrator/editor, of handed-down or -over diaries, letters, souvenirs and other textual "remains" of a pair of lovers' lives. The narrator attempts a coherent narrative of the love affair that the female lover in particular, "Irma," regarded as the only "authentic" experience of her life. While the editor acknowledges that certain changes were made (such as names, places), he remarks in the closing pages of the preface, "I can say of it at least one thing with confidence, even if it is not a piece of literature, it is a piece of life: it is genuinely a human document" (I.24). His handling of the narrative and the very tone of the writing is shadowed by the posthumous nature of the experience it describes, both lovers now being deceased. The Mallock preface, then, is self-consciously and fully aware of the ironies of the situation it sets up, and the metaphorics of textuality pervade the novel. [7] But beyond that—and more crucially for setting up the main focus of the Phillips text—is how the Mallock novel recognizes that identity itself is only precariously revealed by any text.

The relationship between phenomenal experience and textual representation is undermined at every turn in Mallock's text, but is specifically exploited in Phillips's. Irma's diary in particular is a way not simply of recording events of her life, but of actually "experiencing" her life: "Who am I? What am I?" Irma writes at the opening of her diary. "I am nobody, and less than nothing. I am not even one of my own few possibilities" (II.10). Her sense of herself at this point is strangely posthumous, as if life has already passed by her entirely. A once imaginative young woman who acquiesced to an arranged and loveless marriage, she regards herself as a cipher, signifying nothing. For that very reason the inscription of the self-as-past becomes
crucial for her: while she regards her narration as a "confession" for not having experienced and "lived," she also insists that her life must have meaning, and she will use this diary as a history to discover and reveal that meaning. In doing this, in insisting on a self-as-past, she begins imposing a coherence that will create a sense of identity, and allow her to realize that she is "living" for the first time. The diary will concern itself primarily, she writes, with "the pronoun 'I'" (II.11). Seeing herself as "like a book" (II.24), she regards her real life as actually beginning with the diary itself, begun just as she meets her lover, such that in the midst of it she would write, "'Every day of my life is like a page out of an illuminated missal'" (II.161). The insignificant cipher—that "I" empty of any real experience—is, she discovers, a hidden self that writing itself releases into life.

The graphic traces of this self-discovery become Tom Phillips's own self-discovery through the Mallock pretext, the lovers' text metamorphosed into his own, incorporating their actual language as well as their figuration of their love affair as a kind of "fairy tale" (Sleeping Beauty is the one most referred to) or "romance." Like the Mallock lovers, who see their true identities emerge through a love that is mediated continually by language, the double-heroes of this text, "Tom/Toge," construct an identity that finds itself through both art and language's mediation of experience. But just as the Mallock lovers recognize the unreality of this idealized position as just a "dream" from which reality continually awakens them, the "Tom/Toge" narrator(s) of the Phillips text recognize their location at a site between imagination and reality. "Identity," as a negotiation of experience and reflection, is Mallock's deepest subject in the 1892 novel. It is also Phillips's, as he constructs the first of his explicitly autobiographical, if still semi-fictional, epics.

II

A Humument immediately takes on a life of its own that seems to leave its Victorian ancestor far behind. But as I have already suggested Phillips has taken a great deal from the Mallock text: the diary mode; the obsession with "I" and the development of a self-aware subject; the romance plot; the related conflict between reality and imagination, "translated" in the Phillips text into a question of the relationship between reality and Art. Phillips speaks for "himself" in this loosely autobiographical text—that is, there is no separate narrator; but Phillips does introduce a new character, named "Bill Toge," who takes up the romance plot, primarily, searching for love from his "Irma." And it becomes clear, particularly as both "Tom" and "Toge" refer to themselves as "I," that Toge is an alter ego—Bill Hurrell calls him the "everyman alter ego" (n.p.) of Tom himself. Phillips points out that Toge's name can only appear on pages on which the words together or altogether appear, thus linguistically signalling the connection between Tom and his alter ego. Furthermore, notes Phillips, Toge "also has his own recurrent iconography," "a carpet and a window looking out onto a forest and his amoeba-like ever-changing shape is always constructed from the rivers in the type" ("Notes," first revised edition, n.p.; see Fig. 1, from A Humument 155).
This description is an apt reflection of Phillips's intertextual playfulness, since the window motif is one that Phillips would employ elsewhere in his own work, namely, in his illustration of *Dante's Inferno*, and in *Curriculum Vitae*. Paschal calls the window motif a "roving talisman" throughout Phillips's art, that symbolizes the "outlet for the artist's imagination" (21); in other words, the window becomes a self-reflexive symbol of the artist's formalizing activity. The window is at once the medium through which reality is viewed, and also the "artistic frame" through which the artist's own vision of his experience is revealed. In a paradoxical play with this image is Phillips's description of the "ever-changing shape" of Toge. It points precisely to the kind of anti-formalism or postmodern frame-breaking that Phillips insists upon.

What energizes Tom Phillips's *A Humument* as parody is its acknowledgment of and play amongst the various ironies of identity and textuality (identity-as-textuality) of the Mallock novel. The matters of "authenticity" of narrative, of experience, of identity, of the keenly desired but impossible "endless moment" that fuses self and Other, become not the undermining elements of another postromantic narrative, but the very motivating elements of a *postmodern* one that revels in irony itself. *A Humument* refers to itself as "a volume perplex" (6)—that adjective referring not to confusion or mental muddle, but instead to a more etymologically based sense of interwoven intricacy, entanglement, involution (*per* + *plex*, from L. 'to plait, interweave'). Phillips's novel is self-consciously and self-reflexively founded precisely within the ironies that darken romantic desire in the Mallock text; and it not only operates within an overtly discursive context, but also celebrates that context's radical openness.
Like the Mallock text, Phillips's is most fundamentally interested in "the pronoun 'I'"—and is therefore, like its pretext, a kind of diary. Indeed, *A Humument* is something like Wordsworth's *Prelude,* a poetical and graphic epic in which the subject is nothing less than the development of the artist's mind, and, indeed the self-as-Artist: "The following sing I a book," opens Phillips's in an epic mode, "a book of art of mind art and that which he hid reveal I" reads the river of type on page 1 (*Fig. 2*). In that last phrase, he follows the epic tradition of claiming the superiority of his story to his predecessor's —"and that which he hid reveal I"—though Phillips's postmodern sensibilities will shade epic high-seriousness to mock-epic self-irony before too long.

Unlike Mallock's monumentalization of the reticence of any text, in and under which the "real self" or the genuine life remains hidden, Phillips's text employs as many techniques as possible in order to leave nothing uncovered. *A Humument* is, as Phillips describes his work generally,

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research conducted in the labyrinthine house of memory of one's own mind: As I sieved through my past I found that the seeds of all that obsesses and concerns me in my art and life were all sown much earlier than I had guessed. (Portrait Works 78)
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That "labyrinthine house of memory"—an image no doubt wittingly borrowed from Wordsworth and then Keats—is an archival museum of experiential as well as textual traces, the contents of which are displayed throughout this work; not surprisingly from an artist so interested in literary subjects, there are numerous textual allusions, from epic poets (Homer, Virgil, Dante in particular) to Shakespeare, to Byron, Wordsworth and Keats.

But *A Humument*, the very title of which suggests an "exhumation," a recovery of the traces of a corpse/corpus, is most remarkable for its extreme self-referentiality.
That is, the novel is full of graphic as well as verbal allusions to the many-faceted artistic career of Phillips, which has included forays into poetry, music and photography as well as drawing and related graphic arts. Because of the extreme intertextual nature of this work, which breaks boundaries between the textual and the visual, whereby the text itself becomes worked into "image," Phillips is able to turn the leaves of the Mallock pretext into a folio of allusion to the artist's own previous works. One can find visual references to Phillips's "Terminal Greys" series, to the "Flags" series, to his "language drawings" and music or "stave drawings", to his talent for portraiture, to "Mapwalk 1972/3"—among others. There are references to the opera entitled *Irma*—itself a "spin-off" of Phillips's obsession with the Mallock novel—that the artist composed. There are also references to his own personal life, to his multifarious literary and artistic influences, and to recent historical or political events. Phillips's method of constructing the story of an "I" attempts to be all-inclusive—it is an entirely associative art.

Thus Phillips announces with infinite confidence that "I myself am made of reference to myself, / I—I" (194); unlike the hapless Irma, whose past seems to her utterly devoid of experience, and who therefore regards herself as "less than nothing," in-significant, Phillips's text cries out the identity of its author at the turn of every page. On page 68, the image surrounding the bubble-text is a visual self-portrait (Fig. 3); the river of type on this page includes the words "tom" "he'll amuse you" "he's thirty-two." And on one page of *A Humument* (44) is a drawing depicting a brick wall, with the words "TOM WAS HERE X" scrawled across it (Fig. 4). This declaration of identity overtly clarifies a system of visual images that have pervaded the text from the beginning, a system of X's that appear in Phillips's own art. One finds it particularly in *Terminal Greys*, which is composed entirely of overlapping X's in a gradation of gray pigments, and in the *Flags* series, which features every possible permutation of the Union Jack, the central design element of which is, of course, an X. On page 53 of the first revised edition of *A Humument*, the visual design includes a section of a London map including the intersections with Talfourd Road, Phillips's address. Tom's signature is, in other words,
everywhere, disseminated throughout the text, both through visual self-reference, through "his mark," the X, and through verbal allusion that acts self-reflexively within the text, such as the mock-epic opening. The X is thus itself a figuration of the crossing or intersection of texts and images—that is to say, a trope of intertextuality itself, of the associative nature of Phillips's art.\[9\]

III

The Mallock novel is profoundly concerned with the problem of "romance," that is, of the conflict between dream or ideality, and reality; the conflict is figured, not unusually, as sexual romance. But the Mallock text is reticent about actual sexual relations, where the union of ideal and real is momentarily possible—indeed they are never described. This reticence is replaced in A Humument by Phillips's deliberate celebration of the body in Art. The experience of the body is, for the yearning lover Toge, actually highlighted and represented. From the visual perspective, the romance of Toge and Irma is marked by pages with frankly erotic images—on one page, crowds of erotic and evidently coupling figures emerge, on another Toge's desire for Irma is represented in the explicit image of a phallus rising out of a landscape like the sun, and past the borders of the page (244). On yet another, love-making itself is represented by "bursts" of intercourse's sounds: one page consists of the highlighted letters "ugh"; another consists of repeated "bursts" of the word "come" (343). The eroticism repressed by A Human Document is thus recovered, "exhumed," by A Humument; Mallock's delicate narrative, which downshifts the expression of raw desire into a mannered expression of yearning, is revised by Phillips's effort to (literally) draw out the experience of physical desire and love-making.

Fig. 4

The Phillips text therefore suffers none of the irony associated in the Mallock text with the conflict between romance and reality. Far from wishing to live in a
Sleeping Beauty fairy tale world suspended in time, away from society and history and a narrow sexual ideology, as Irma and her lover Grenville do, Phillips and his alter ego Toge live in a world in which conditions and contingencies are not lamented but regarded as simply factitious. Art is not separate from, but entirely implicated in, the reality, the identity, of “Tom.” The dizzying con-fusion or “fusing-together” of influences and events and self-references creates the sense of a life that is authentic not insofar as it escapes reality, but rather insofar as it aesthetically incorporates or appropriates reality—by textualizing it.

Phillips's narrative is only weakly linear: the romance plot involving Toge and Irma is juxtaposed, or often plaited, with Tom's self-portrait of the artist. This latter strand of the text is far less linear in its organization, mingling as it does “the present” with references to the past through the flexibility of the mixed-media nature of the work. Phillips opens his work to all possible relations, without prioritizing, temporally or otherwise. “The life” is seen in this text not as a linear narrative, a steady development from naiveté to retrospective understanding, but rather as a labyrinthine movement through shifting contexts that are created by the mind's own endless capability for new associations. “Only connect toge” urges Phillips's text (185), alluding of course to E. M. Forster and his steadfast humanism.

This is no doubt the source of art itself for Phillips—indeed it is the method of his art generally, which critics describe as characteristically obsessive and "recapitulative." What emerges from A Humument is an "I" that is formed by a variety of patterns which, by the text's close, we understand to be the patterns, both linguistic and visual or graphic, by which "Tom" comprehends his world, by which he gives coherence to his own sense of identity as the artist Tom Phillips. There is thus for him no separation of life and fantasy, reality and art; these are merely different, but inseparable, modes of perception for this artist. The romantic assertion of the supremacy of art, furthermore, comes to seem irrelevant, so much of "reality" is appropriated into Art, and vice versa. A Humument thus thrives at the point of postmodern confrontation, where, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody. At this conjuncture, a study of representation becomes, not a study of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past. (Politics of Postmodernism 7)

Reading and studying the text/images of A Humument, the reader actively undergoes the experience of self-understanding along with the diarist. Far from being a conventional reading experience, this verbal-visual text—with its dynamic play at the borders between text and image, Tom and Toge, high art and low art—deluges the reader/spectator with many choices for interpretation. With visual and verbal elements interfering dynamically with one another, with direct statement and indirect associations presented simultaneously, our understanding of the "I" in this text feels far less mediated, even though there is clearly a narrator here. The notion of a privileged status for the narrator is disabused; the reflective moments that occur in the text appear no more confident and authoritative than our own.

For this reason, the posthumous feel of Mallock's fictional biography—its overwhelming sense of "pastness," of being an artifact of two lives—is eliminated from the Phillips text. This is supported even more forcefully by the author's own introduction, which tells us that in fact work on A Humument has never ended. The work is constantly being revised, with each page of the original work gradually being replaced by a different version. The third revised edition has just been published (1998), and one can now visit the Tom Phillips Homepage on the World Wide Web to view recently composed and unpublished pages from A Humument. Phillips seems to anticipate no reason to stop working on A Humument; according to Hurrell, Phillips continues working on the project according to a regime he began in 1966, when he “resolved not to squander precious daylight hours of worktime on what he suspected may be a wild all consuming folly. The pages were produced in the hours between supper and bed.
Hurrell notes his own perception, formed over the course of years of *Humument*-watching, that Phillips's interests have "traveled from [their] initial concerns with cut-up techniques and the random beauty of chance, where the influences of William Burroughs and John Cage were felt, towards a more layered and decorative style reminiscent of Owen Jones' Grammar of Ornament" (n.p.)[15] Phillips's work is a peculiarly "living" autobiography capable of appropriating every new experience, every new work of art, by its author. [16] In continually "updating" this autobiography, Phillips's central concerns become the *decentered* textual self, the decentered textual *form*, as well as the distinctive textures of engagements that create the dynamism (both visual and verbal) of this work. Indeed, in addition to numerous spin-offs of *A Humument* (see footnote 1), Phillips's exploration with autobiography reaches its full fruition in his later *Curriculum Vitae* series (in progress since 1986), which, according to Paschal, is a "painted 'Song of Myself'"; "[c]ompared to that doctored dossier *A Humument*," he adds, "the *Curriculum Vitae* paintings are forthright autobiography" (21).

But even more than *Curriculum Vitae*, *A Humument* revels in the prospect of endless possibilities, endless connections. While Mallock's Irma "bequeathed" her story to a future reader, in order that her "authentic" version might be told, the story is mediated, constructed, selected over by the posthumous editing of the narrator. Phillips's text, however, imagines a notion of textuality that is not "simply" monumental, and a notion of narrative that is not closed, but open to a dynamic incoherence on the one hand, and to a continuous intertextual revision on the other. While the Mallock text may regret the irony that Irma's authentic narrative must be undermined by the presence of an editor, Phillips's text revels in the fact that "meaning-granting" can be so fluid: it is the very source of his art, that gap between "experiencing and knowing," or between undergoing and evaluating (Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism* 74).

Phillips recognizes in Mallock's *A Human Document* the various gaps and attendant ironies that make postmodernism possible. He exploits a Victorian pretext that explores the limitations of a romantic biography that can only be an archive of prior textualizations, and celebrates, instead, the illimitable possibilities of an autobiography made up of constantly changing horizons and contexts in order to create a (self)history that is progressively self-contradictory, accumulative, endlessly retrospective, yet novel—in other words, radically postmodern. Phillips leaves us, in a way both different and similar to Mallock's editor, with "vestiges and versions" (Wolfson 103) that defy both the authority of any single text, and of any single projection of self or identity.

"Identity" in Phillips's text is incoherent. Itself a Barthesian activity of production, "Tom" is a textualized subject created by an autobiography in which *revision* is the central trope. This trope, at once method of composition and a way of seeing, constitutes "a resistance," as Susan Wolfson puts it while discussing Wordsworth's revisionary autobiography, "to arresting and fixing phantoms of conceit in a final frame of autobiographical argument" (104). Phillips's dynamic form of autobiography, like the subject it represents, is "polymorphously" (self)productive, in both text and image. Thus Phillips creates a unique poetics[17] of subjectivity that celebrates originality—while acknowledging the very elusiveness of the "origin" at which one could locate "the self." The specularity and endless play of Art and Reality come closest to the subjective "truth" for Phillips, and make possible the extraordinary forms of self-portraiture, in word and image alike (and simultaneously) that he continues to produce.

**Works Cited**


Since 1966 have appeared not only several editions of A Humument, but also an opera called Irma, and another text called The Heart of the Humument, both based on the same Mallock novel. Phillips has also produced a series of "humument globes," again constructed from pages of the Mallock novel. While I have worked off the first trade edition of A Humument for this essay, a third revised edition was released earlier this year (1998), published by Thames and Hudson.

I borrow this term from Susan Wolfson's Formal Charges, whose chapter on Wordsworth's poetical autobiography, The Prelude, provides useful avenues of thought regarding autobiography as a genre. The quotation comes from p. 27.

Phillips has noted that the work is also deliberately modeled on Francesco Colonna's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, "the most beautiful of printed books, published in Venice in 1499" ("Notes," A Humument, n.p.), and influenced as well by medieval illuminated manuscripts.

6. Marvin A. Sackner, Phillips's primary private collector and co-founder of the Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, also associates the title word with "the idea of Humanism, which the German philosopher Schiller emphasised as the idea of the creative individual thought forming the basis of personal truth" ("Humumentism," n.p.).


8. Phillips refers to this Romantic work in discussing the epic aspects of his own *Curriculum Vitae*.

9. Paschal mentions this motif in his introduction to *Tom Phillips: Works and Texts*: "Phillips transplants the x's stockpiled in that series [Terminal Greys] to *A Humument*, where he encourages its replication. One sating can be documented. On a page of painted bricks, a graffiti artist has left a large, lanky x appended to a meandering message only partially visible. Supplied, the informal epigraph reads 'Tom was here,' with the x as a reiterating postscript. All of Phillips' x's coalesce. The indelible mark on the bricks is the enriched x this artist uses as record [sic] of his activities—and ratification of his greater purpose. The credo, 'value various imagined ways,' forms the elastic spine of Phillips' buoyant originality. It is affirmed with wit and passion—as much as by the sensuous x's of the *Terminal Greys* as by the visionary translations of Mallock and Dante" (21).

10. Beyond the many reviews of Phillips's exhibitions (see the bibliography on p. 293 of *Tom Phillips: Words and Texts*, by Tom Phillips), recent work on postmodern fiction and genre have begun noticing his work. See: Hubert, 118-21; and also Nigel Wheale, who discusses Phillips's art, including *A Humument*, on pp. 125-7, and again on 163-85. The best writing on Phillips, however, comes from Huston Paschal.

11. See Hutcheon once again on this kind of "typically postmodern border tension" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 119).

12. Phillips's conception of the extreme openness of interpretation is also reflected in his method of composition; in his "Notes" he recalls that "some texts took years to reach a definitive state, usually because such a rich set of alternatives was present on a single page and only rarely because the page seemed quite intractable. In order to prove (to myself) the inexhaustibility of even a single page I started a set of variations of page 85: I have already made over twenty" (n.p.).

13. Paschal refers to the reader as "[s]et adrift" in the text (17). William Gass's review of *A Humument* describes the "pure exhilaration" of a reader's initial contact with the text: "It is a joyful thing to be in the presence of such a rich variety of form and idea, wit and resonance, color and figure, paradox and puzzle, where the profound is rendered rightly as a doodle, and the page is reentered to encounter a bravura'd new'd world" (n.p.).

14. Phillips claimed some years back that he now had an entirely reworked Mallock text, with almost no pages surviving from the first edition. According to Hurrell, there are now five variants of the original book (n.p.).

15. For more on the influence of Cage and on the aesthetics of chance in the postmodern, see Daniel Traister's "Tom Phillips and A Humument" at the Tom Phillips Homepage.

16. Consider the relevance of this passage from Paul de Man's "Autobiography as Defacement": "We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest... that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture?...Does the reference
determine the figure, or is it the other way round: is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a reference at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity?” (69).

17. Sackner has coined the term "humumentism" to describe Phillips’s "unique artistic inventiveness"; he defines the term as "artistic creativity carried out in parallel styles and themes." Sackner judges *A Humument* to be "the most important artist's book of the twentieth century... ‘Humumentism’ is an art form that integrates humanistic activities through individual creative [sic] though that falls outside the current popular conception of artistic presentation" (n.p.).