

In memory of my father  
Leslie Joseph De Bolla

# The Discourse of the Sublime

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*Readings in History, Aesthetics  
and the Subject*

PETER DE BOLLA

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## Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Advertisement: the Phantasmic Body	1
1 Introductory: Towards the Subject	4
PART I	
2 The Discourse on the Sublime	27
3 The Discourse of the Sublime	59
4 The Discourse of Debt	103
PART II	
5 The Voice of Liberty	143
6 Of the Gesture of the Orator: the Speaking Subject	146
7 The Body in Place	183
8 Of the Distance of the Picture: the Viewing Subject	186
9 A Licentious Portrait	223
10 Of the Transport of the Reader: the Reading Subject	230
PART III	
11 Of the Sublime	281
Bibliography	301
Index	319

## Acknowledgements

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It would be difficult to ascertain when and where this book began. Parts of it go back to Cambridge 1979 when I first became interested in eighteenth-century aesthetics, but it took on the conceptual framework of a book in the summer of 1984 which was spent furiously entering the first two hundred pages into a computer in Geneva. I give a brief account of origin in order to register the fact that this book has been with me for some time, and, having been with me for this length of time, it has been with others too. It is customary here to acknowledge what one recognizes as one's intellectual debts and fleetingly to mention those who have lived through, at varying distances, the production of all these words. I will come to those intellectual debts in a moment but would like to reverse the order and priority and place first those friends and family who have sustained the project in a variety of ways over a significant number of years. I would like to thank and acknowledge those who are or were in Cambridge: Andrew Ashfield, John Barrell, Norman Bryson, Jonathan Burt, Bill Buford, David Feldman, and Nicolette Zeeman. I hope that they remember as fondly as I do the many hours of idiosyncratic, excessive, improbable, impossible conversation. The book was written over five years spent in Geneva: at times it felt a very everted kind of place, but the following were so generous with their time and friendship that it came to feel as if Switzerland were the only place to write a book on this subject. It gives me pleasure to name those who are or were in Geneva: Chris Baswell, Thierry Dubois, John Higgins, Max and Simone Oetli, John O'Toole, Greg Polletta, Bill Readings, Bruce Robbins, Jim Warren and Richard Waswo. I wish also to express my gratitude to the participants in two seminars held in the Department of English in 1986/7, one on the Literature of the Sublime and the other on Reading Rhetorics. They were kind enough to allow me a certain licence with which to work out a number of ideas presented here, and to look interested when the conversation became, as it all too often did, displaced and excessive. When I recall those years spent in Geneva it seems appropriate to add a further note of thanks to Norman Bryson for his tireless encouragement and unfailing support throughout the years of writing. His prompt correspondence

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Peter de Bolla  
King's College  
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## Advertisement: The Phantasmic Body

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Two men, who have known as intimate a friendship as any, share a room in London during late March 1808. The one was suffering from intense premonitions of death, brought on no doubt by illness, overwork and despair. In February he had written: 'I remain ill and speak from no fit of Despondency, when I say that I know, I have not many weeks to live. I could scarcely read my last lecture thro' . . . As I went thither from my bed, so I returned thence to my bed, and have never quitted it except for an hour or two . . . at night to have the bed made.' His close circle of acquaintances were naturally concerned about his health and wrote asking his great companion to come and visit. Some time in March his friend arrived, and the two men spent many hours, day and night, in rapturous conversation, transporting speculation. The friend, who suffered from extreme anxiety brought on by writing, was pressed upon to make notes by the man in bed, whose illness and depression restricted him from doing this himself.

One day the sick man wakes from a reverie, induced perhaps by his illness or, more likely, from the medication he takes to relieve his suffering, and calls out for his friend. His friend arrives bearing the book they had been reading the night before, Knight's *An analytical inquiry into the principles of taste*, expecting to continue the arduous and, for him, oppressively distressing task of annotating the text. The sick man seems deeply disturbed by his waking dream and insists on telling it.

'A man of thirty-six years of age, in good health but depressed spirits has recently returned from a voluntary exile abroad. He has taken lodgings in London where he is temporarily employed giving public lectures. Many things weigh heavily on his mind, from his guilt about his refusal to take up the cloth to his continual doubt about his poetic genius. These things disturb his thought and interrupt his sleep. He is walking in the parish of St Giles, Cripplegate when he notices in the graveyard adjacent to the church two figures engaged in some mysterious activity. It is night and difficult to perceive the precise nature of their business, but it has the air of something satanic. His mind is fixed on a line of

verse: "whose eye darted contagious fire", a line that echoes in his voice he knows not from where, when a sound of metal on wood focuses his attention on the shadowy figures not ten yards distant. He stills his motion and peers intently through the gloom: he can perceive two men about their fennish work, one of whom suddenly turns and spots the intruder. Quickly one holds up something which the other seems to cut. A dull thud signals the severance of part from whole upon which sound the two men, scarcely secreting their departure, take off as Orpheus out of hell.

"The man is stupefied but intrigued, and reflects for a few moments on what his course of action might be. He quickly decides without additional prevarication to investigate the darkness further, and enter the graveyard. With five steps he reaches the spot hitherto occupied by the two mysterious figures and instantly recognizes the nature of their deed: in front of him is an open grave, the coffin prised apart. Peering further into the darkness he makes out a body below, carelessly dropped back into its final resting place. The head is closest to him, the head, he thinks, of a woman whose great length of hair has been savagely ripped in places by the disturbed grave robbers. He stops to place the body back in a more comfortable position, when once again the line of verse springs unthought to his mind: "whose eye darted contagious fire." Turning from the savage scene he makes as if to leave the sacred spot when his eye falls upon the headstone above the troubled grave. The name it bears is John Milton."

At this point the man in bed begins to smile at his friend, a half glimmering look of mischief, and holds his hand up in the air to silence his companion. "There's more" he says, continuing:

"The man walks from the graveyard admonished by his brush with the other world, and reflects upon his recent acquisition, the bed from which he strays on this midnight ramble, the bed which belonged to the poet whose ghost he is even now struggling to exorcize, John Milton. He turns towards the light from the half moon and proceeds as if for his lodging place when he is suddenly accosted by a woman dressed in rags who attempts to seduce him into criminal conversation. She explains that she cannot let him pass without his hearing what she has to say. He stops for the briefest moment but is immediately a captive of her converse. She claims that she can cure him of his ailments by touching him. He replies that his troubles are of the mind not of the body, but she will not be dissuaded. "Hundreds of ailing people, both men and women, rich and poor attend my humble dwelling in Crewe each day" she says, "come, I will help you too."

"The woman begins to drag him towards some shady building, he protesting all the while, but she has succeeded in bewitching him enough to entice him into her dank and miserable apartment. The reluctant spellbound innocent, who utters not a sound, is transfixed by the sight which greets him: a man is suspended from the ceiling, a cord of some description around his neck, his breeches about his ankles and body motionless. "He said it was an experiment,"

she hissed, "an amorous experiment. But I am sore afraid he's dead before the results could be ascertained". The man turns quickly on his heels, contagious confusion darts from eye to eye, and rushes from the terrifying scene.<sup>1</sup>

At this point the sick man on the bed begins to colour and tremble with apparent agitation. 'You recall' he murmurs to his friend, 'the mark on the woman's body'. His friend looks askance, and starts to open the book he has brought with him. 'Shall I begin to write?' he questions. The sick man motions to him signalling in the affirmative. His friend takes out his pencil and awaits the first dictation: 'A man in good health but depressed spirits suffers from a recurrent dream whose significance he cannot fathom. The dream begins in another man's dream, a methodical dream of credit:

'Methought I returned to the great hall, where I had been the morning before, but to my surprise, instead of the company that I left there, I saw, towards the upper end of the hall, a beautiful virgin, seated on a throne of gold. Her name (as they told me) was Public Credit.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Milton's grave was disinterred in 1790 ostensibly in order to ascertain whether it had been laid to rest in the graveyard or in the church. The body was found outside the church close to a headstone for a woman. A controversy ensued as to whether the body was actually Milton's, it having been returned that the body found in the coffin was a man's. The coffin was disinterred a second time in order to certify the body as male. The corpse was found to have been mutilated, and certain parts of the body, including a length of hair – Milton was known to have had very long hair – were being sold on a makeshift black market. These and other details can be found in Philip Neve, *A Narrative of the disinterment of Milton's coffin* (London, 1790).

Akenside was given a bed which was supposed to have belonged to Milton in June in 1761 by a Mr Thomas Hollis. The bed arrived with the following message on a card: 'An English gentleman is desirous of having the honour to present a bed, which once belonged to John Milton, and on which he died, to Dr Akenside; and if the Doctor's genius, believing himself obliged, and having slept in that bed, should prompt him to write an ode to the memory of John Milton, and the assertors of British liberty, that gentleman would think himself abundantly recompensed.' *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside* (London, 1845), p. 54.

Bridget Bostock enjoyed considerable fame for a brief period in 1749. She was supposed to have been able to cure people by touching them. Hundreds of visitors made the trip from London to Crewe daily for a while. See W. H. Chalmer, *Bridget Bostock* (Crewe, 1948).

Criminal conversation was the term used for adultery during the period. The publications of the proceedings of hearings of adultery cases were extremely popular. See Francis Plowden, *Crim. con, Biography* (London, 1789).

The case of Francis Kotzwartta, who was found dead from strangulation is reported in *Modern Provenances; or, an Essay on the Art of Strangling* (London, 1791?). The poor girl who had been fooled into performing the 'amorous experiment', Susannah Hill, was acquitted of his murder. The dream of Public Credit is Joseph Addison's, *Spectator* no. 3, not mine.

# I

## Introductory: Towards the Subject

What was it to be a subject in the eighteenth century? What were the prevailing concepts, the ruling ideologies informing a man's or a woman's conception of self? What determined those informing ideologies of subjectivity, how were they policed? Did the sense of self change over the course of the century, and if it did was that change uniform for all subjects in all places? These are the kinds of question that I hope may be overlaid on the opening fantasy, a cento of strange figurations of the body and the self, jammed together haphazardly in order to give a foretaste of the topics and concerns of this book, and to initiate a sense of what I will term theory's imaginary in its desire to bring the subject back from the past. Perhaps this fantasy scene is too reminiscent of a certain contemporary penchant for the striking example but I hope that the distances between the anecdotal and the *unreal* quality of the opening dream will become apparent very quickly. For, whatever else the force of this opening advertisement might be, its purpose is to problematize its appropriation of the past.

We may begin in earnest by stating the central problematic addressed by this book: there is no 'history' of the 'subject', and there are very few histories of subjects. These terms 'history' and 'subject' are bounded by quotation marks in order to register the difficulty of talking at the most general levels about the subject and history. We need to know first, here, what is meant by a subject and what by history; and, furthermore, we need to investigate the possibility of placing these two terms in close proximity. In what sense can the 'subject' have a history; does the concept of selfhood, individuality, have a narrative history, or, this sense of history and subject being perhaps unlocatable, should all histories of selfhood, in contrast, be grounded in specific subjects? Further, is it possible to speak of the subject without resorting to social, political and cultural description? Can we speak of the self without addressing the history of philosophical and theological enquiry into this concept, at least the history of this concept as it occurs in the West? These questions are addressed to the property of the subject as agent, as that which acts and is acted upon by forces external and occasionally internal to it. They will by and large be ignored throughout this study in favour

of an extremely specific working of the category 'subject'. By this I mean to clarify and make precise what might otherwise become extremely obscure and imprecise: when the term 'subject' is used throughout this book I do not mean to refer to particular subjects, to specific individuals, nor to the subject as an agent within the social, cultural or political, but to a position, a space or an opening within discourse. This location might be labelled 'the subject position' or the 'subject effect'. Both these labels and how I use the term discourse are discussed in detail below.

From this very general standpoint it might be said that every 'age' constructs its own concept of the subject, its own myths of self. For our own time it is clear that any description of the subject which ignores Freud's lifework and Lacan's 'rereading' of it would, to some extent, be very partial. We might note from this, our own late twentieth-century perspective, that the subject 'after Freud' is something else, something other. Yet if we were to begin a history of the subject in this manner, should such a thing be both possible and desirable, it would find itself competing with no more or less power as a descriptive model, with a number of earlier interventions, such as the Cartesian moment, or the Humean enquiry, any or all of which might see themselves as offering grander and more comprehensive accounts of the self. Taken in relation to such 'histories' or narrative accounts of human subjectivity the eighteenth-century 'discovery' or 'rise' of the subject, as it is variously described, is simply one more competing description, one more example of how a particular age 'rediscovered' or reinvented its own sense of self.

To begin here, then, is to begin by registering the daunting scope and size of the field: every age has its own concept of selfhood, and every succeeding 'age' may or may not choose to interpret this concept in its own fashion, and very often in its own self-image. It does not take very long before we arrive at a surfeit of descriptions which, although they may be regarded as primarily and properly historical, tend to be reduced to appropriations of a past age by the powerful operation of our own controlling myths of selfhood. It is very difficult, when we attempt to think the subject historically, to imagine a time that was not as it is now, to appropriate a Miltonic formulation, and this only goes to exacerbate our attempts to clarify the description of a presentist historical sense of human agency, of an historicized subjectivity. It is clear that we are only able to perceive this difficult question from our own historical, cultural and ideological perspectives, and that we are unable to recover the plenitude of the past in order to check, in as much detail and with as much care as possible, our findings and descriptions. To register this, however, is not to relinquish the considerable control and subtlety we may wield in our historical investigations; historical enquiry must constantly measure and monitor its accounts of the past against its own enabling and disabling fictions, and to write as knowingly as possible within those discourses of appropriation, limitation and control.

To return to the opening set of questions, this study begins with the

assumption that the human subject is not the same through history, and that, furthermore, the modern subject, the subject generated in, by and through the age of reason, is the result or product of a particular discursive network uniquely present to the years 1756-63, but largely initiated and substantiated during this period. To claim this is quite clearly to claim something outrageous, and, by and large, beyond the demonstration and scope of one book, and perhaps beyond the powers of any historical investigation. However, I will make the statement once more, in a slightly expanded form, since it will serve to guide the reader through the following argument which, for reasons set out below, is far from linear, often obscured by detail or distorted by over-simplification, but never simple. [The guiding formulation is this: the autonomous subject, a conceptualization of human subjectivity based on the self-determination of the subject and the perception of the uniqueness of every individual, is the product of a set of discourses present to the period 1756-63, the period of the Seven Years War.] This set of discourses will be investigated in detail in the first part of the present study which examines how and in what ways two extremely powerful discourses of legislation, what I term the discourse on debt and the discourse on the sublime, generate the discursive milieu within which the autonomous subject becomes apparent. (The terms being used here are deliberately unfocused and guarded since it will take some weight of argument and detail to demonstrate how I conceive of the subject discursively.) I shall argue that it is the combination of these two discourses, on debt and on the sublime, the one producing the rationale for a never-ending inflation of the national debt, the other a powerful mechanism for ever more sublime sensation, which leads to a conceptualization of the subject as the excess or overplus of discourse itself: as the remainder, that which cannot be appropriated or included within the present discursive network of control. On account of this the subject, given that it is always outside the discourses within which it is initially generated, becomes both producer and product of another set of discourses which contextualize and control subjectivity. This central paradox or irresolvable duplicity, that the subject is both producer and product of its own discursive formation, will feature throughout the argument which follows.

The immediate retort to this very bald description of the eighteenth-century rise of the subject might be that such a self-determination of the subject is nothing new, indeed it is present in all descriptions of the self. This can only be dealt with at length in the sequence of chapters which follows. It is enough to note now, at the very outset, that this over-generalized statement will, in the long term, require considerable and sophisticated adjustment, and that its illuminative powers may prove to be very limited; it is, however, the initiating impulse behind, and determining hypothesis of, this study, which ends up complicating the story no end through the interrogation of the limits and limitations implied by it. Here, as a point of departure, it should be noted that I am proposing a history of the subject which is extremely specific, perhaps

distortingly miniaturized, while also offering a myth of origin of enormous proportions. To say that the autonomous subject begins in the period 1756-63 is to risk a great deal, since it begs so many questions and demands so many qualifications that it might appear, at least initially, to have almost no explanatory power. This is, however, the most economical way of introducing the present argument, no matter how crude it may be; it will become considerably more complex and qualified as we progress.

It is useful to note in regard to this overly simplistic point of departure that there are, in fact, various descriptions of the rise of the subject during the eighteenth century in the extant literature which are certainly not very far from the one given above. It has long been held, for example, that the period witnessed the emergence of 'bourgeois individualism', the capitalist entrepreneur, and the dissenting businessman. It has become something of a *side reque* in fact, so that our histories of eighteenth-century life and culture are disfigured by this notion. The following argument will not take issue with these generally dispersed formulations since the present study does not attempt to square its findings with the larger histories of the subject, nor with any wider cultural, social, or political descriptions of the period. In this sense I am not mounting an argument with, or which should be placed within, the domain of academic history writing; indeed many may find it flies in the face of the good sense associated with the proper study of history. It is, however, profoundly, if problematically, historical in its procedures and aims. This, I take it, is almost self-explanatory in all of the chapters following.

It is important, however, to sketch the governing principles at work throughout, since this will make visible the differences between my own conceptualizations of the autonomous subject and those I take to be present to the generally dispersed notions referred to above. The global task addressed in this study is the examination of a discursive network, a phrase I have already used above, and which will occur with great frequency in what follows. What I take this phrase to suggest is this: at any specific historical (by which I mean in shorthand historical, social, political, cultural and ideological, and for economy's sake will refer to throughout as simply 'historical') juncture a discursive network articulates the 'real', it allows and controls the possibilities for representation. This network is made up of a number of discrete discourses, which interact, sometimes without hostility, at others with considerable violence, with each other. The distances and lines of force between specific discourses vary to a great extent, so that a particular discourse present to a specific discursive network may have almost insignificant connections to all the other discourses within the network. This network is historically specific, but it may change, in whole or in part, with great frequency. Alternatively it may be highly resistant to change. Within any discursive network there may be smaller networks which articulate or are active within particular aspects of the larger discursive milieu. If we make this concrete for a moment it will become clearer. Let us say that

the discursive network present to the beginning of the eighteenth century includes the discrete discourses of theology, ethics, politics, aesthetics, education, gaming, etc. (It will clearly never be possible to complete this list.) Within this network we can see quite easily that theology and ethics are very close, and interpenetrate each other, whereas gaming and education are less likely to have been proximate. (I have given examples of discourses which are, of course, all interconnected, in order to note that even within such a close group it is possible to postulate distances – I could have given a more exaggerated example, such as the non-connection of cookery to politics.)

When we turn to the subject and attempt to locate the discursive network in which it is generated during the eighteenth century we will encounter the difficulty of describing the precise distances or connections discrete discourses have to each other. This is partly because categories such as the subject are more likely to be stretched across a vast array of discrete discourses rather than inhering within any one. In all of the discussion so far it should be clear that I am stressing the 'discursive' to the exclusion of any other descriptions of the individual. This is necessary in order to examine the ways in which the subject is produced by and within discourse, but it is also a methodological strategy which finds little time for speculations concerned with the intentions of particular individuals in the past: I do not find it useful to claim that a particular representation, for example, is the product of one uniquely gifted individual, who grasped the totality of the discursive network present to his or her own time, and moulded it to his or her own ends, forced it to function in the service of his or her own desires. It would seem to me to be obvious that this is one of the roles the concept of the individual plays within the entire network of available discourses, but we should not only question the particular concept of the subject at work here (which is context-specific to our analysis), but also recognize the debilitating force of this kind of description and analysis. For while it may be obvious to privilege the role of the individual, it is also absolutely impossible to make any kind of historical analysis of the aims and intentions of dead persons: historical knowledge is, *de facto*, discursive.

All of this looks like a well-worn, and by now out of date, rebuttal of the 'great men' theory of history. Social historians in England and America, not to mention the historians connected to the French 'Annales' school, have for some considerable time been rewriting the history books from a perspective close to this. Yet one further disclaimer needs to be made, and it concerns my working notion of 'discourse'. It is more than evident that a social historian takes as his or her research material 'discourse' in the widest sense: the researcher goes into the archive, which might be traditionally constructed and include those great or significant 'texts' of the past thought worthy of preservation, or alternatively may be more open and include oral 'texts' and ephemera deemed 'unserious' by some practitioners of the discipline, and recovers portions of the past in order to weave them into a more or less coherent narrative. These 'texts', the recovered

discourses, are the basis for analyses and descriptions of the past, which are coloured by the particular historian's methodology and aims: they are not, however, the basis for my own working notion of discourse.

Another historical enterprise, usually called intellectual history, utilizes a more capacious working notion of 'discourse', in which the discourses for analysis are not taken to be based within any particular text or set of texts: they are presumed to be generally dispersed throughout the particular historical context – in the air as it were – and part of the intellectual historian's task is to sort them out and track them down. Again, although this notion of discourse is certainly closer to my own working method, it is still not quite the same as the concept used throughout this study.

In my sketch of a 'discursive network' above it is apparent that a distinction is being made between a 'discrete discourse' and the network of which it is a part. It is this distinction which enables us to specify in a little more detail the working notion of 'discourse' for the present study. I take it that a discrete discourse both signals its detachment from neighbouring discourses, and is founded upon its own sense of itself as a discrete form. Let us return to the sketch given above of a possible discursive network at the start of the eighteenth century. It is self-evident that politics, ethics, and theology are all interconnected; they are for our own time as much as for any period in the past, indeed our definitions of these things very often require that they be interconnected. Yet to say this is not to claim that the connections are the same, that the distances or lines of force are identical through history. Furthermore, it already supposes that these three kinds of talk, about politics, ethics, and theology can not only be distinguished by us, from our present perspective, but that they could also be distinguished then, within the historical context. We are naturally led to ask from this: what kept politics in the eighteenth century distinct from theology, what allowed or forced it to be articulated within certain limits, what determined its use of neighbouring discourses, what allowed or enabled it to make use of them? For it is clear that while politics is a 'discrete discourse' it is also inextricably caught within the web of associations and interconnections which characterize the entire network. In order to stabilize the discourse for analysis, then, the working method I have used is to isolate a discrete discourse when it appears to operate the principle of exclusion (even though we know that this never was, nor is possible), when it proclaims itself as a discourse on something.

It is for this reason that I have used a distinction between two kinds of discourse: the first, a discourse on something, is to be taken as a discrete discourse, a discourse which is to be read in a highly specific way, within a very well defined context. A discourse on politics, for example, can be located in the eighteenth century by noting those 'texts' which require now, as much as they required then, to be placed within the context of the political. Pitt's 'resignation' speech on 2 October 1761, while it utilizes all manner of discourse, in the simple sense, is clearly a part of the discourse on politics of the period. It is this kind of



discursive form I will refer to as a discrete discourse, here the discourse on politics. Any reading which wanted to take account of this speech in terms of the wider range of discourses both present to it and positioned by it would attempt to describe its affiliations to neighbouring discourses, and produce an analysis which located the discrete discourse within its enabling discursive network.

This discourse on something is to be distinguished from a discourse of something. To return to the above example, the discourse of politics for the eighteenth century (we are using a very large unit here for explanatory purposes; any working analysis would have to be much more specific than this) is made up of a number of discrete discourses, from ethics and theology to duelling, and includes the discourse on politics: it does not, however, demand that it be read as a discrete discourse on something. We will locate the discourse of politics in a very wide range of discursive situations – this is clear from our own sense of the political – but wherever it is found its interconnections with other discrete discourses will be found to be complex and indirect. Furthermore, the discourse of something may well subsume a large number of discrete discourses, so that the discourse of politics, for example, may make the discourse on duelling insignificant to the point where it becomes merely the technical description of the activity, so that political criteria come to be seen as determining the practice of duelling over and above any technical considerations about it. It is this which enables us to claim, should we wish to, that duelling, during the eighteenth century, was a political act not a personal or private one.

This distinction between two types of discourse assume that we are able to identify those discourses which say 'read me like this': it is the burden of the second chapter to demonstrate that this is possible in the realm of eighteenth-century British aesthetics. Furthermore, it requires that the second kind of discourse is not allowed to become all-subsuming, so that the discourse of politics is not seen to be present in every kind of discourse and area of discursive activity. It is in respect to this that the model of a discursive network has been proposed. This allows us to note the interrelations between discrete discourses at a specific time, and in the service of a particular analysis; it allows us to note that the same network might look very different, the connections and distances between discourses may differ enormously, from another perspective, both from our position, and within the historical context. Thus, if we were to begin the task of writing a history of architecture for the period, we might be faced with precisely the same discursive network as that characterized above (although it would be more likely to be different) but in which the connections between discrete discourses not only appear to us to be different, but were also perceived to be different within the historical context. Furthermore, any alteration in the emphasis we give to a particular discrete discourse, even when we maintain our perspective and the general focus of the enquiry, may well alter the lines of force between those discourses which constitute the larger network. I am proposing,

then, an analytical method which stabilizes the network at the point of analysis, but which claims that the resulting topology which is our analysis is no more than one momentarily stabilized account. This method brings a number of distinct advantages over the wider concept of discourse referred to above, since it allows us to note how the discursive network is arranged at any particular time, enabling us to compare it, should we wish to, with another. In this fashion we would be able to note larger-scale connections and changes while maintaining the specificity of both the point of analysis and the discursive network.

It also allows us to notice the self-reflexive nature of the discourse on something, which must identify its neighbouring discourses within the network in order to define its own boundaries: representation, in the simplistic formulation above, is not only made possible by the discourses available, those discourses are also determined by representation. In precisely the same manner the discourse of something is reflected in and by the discourse on something. From time to time I refer to a discursive 'node' as another way of describing the network, hoping to activate a sense which brings to the foreground the impossibility of talking about one strand of a complicated knot without implicating all the other strands. We do attempt to do this, of course, in order to proceed in the task of argumentation and analysis.

These comments about the use of terminology are made in order to forestall possible misunderstandings and to mark the distances between my own working sense of discourse and those found in a number of different contemporary disciplines and enquiries. Perhaps the most obvious acknowledgement I should make in this regard is to the work of Michel Foucault. However, while recognizing that the present work, its aims and structures of argument, would be unthinkable without Foucault, I do wish to maintain a certain distance from that body of work. Although the current book is not in any sustained sense a critique of Foucault's mobilization of various concepts around the discursive – I am thinking here of 'episteme' and 'discursive formation' – there are distinct differences between what I take to be Foucault's use of discourse and its cognates and my own.<sup>1</sup> Thus, where there is a tendency in Foucault's earlier work to stabilize the object of study through the use of the concept 'discursive practice' I have attempted to destabilize all the discursive networks described and analysed in this book. This has been carried out on account of a scepticism which operates not only in respect to what one can uncover or recover from the past, the purported object of historical enquiry, but also in respect to the present point of analysis, to its enabling discursive forms, fictions, fantasies. I take it that these extremely brief and crude remarks concerning the distances between the

<sup>1</sup>Of course a properly sensitive reading here would remark that the work designated under the name of Foucault is not one thing: that it has its own history, that it undergoes transformation across and within various texts and so on. I leave these matters outside the present text for the reasons given within it.

present work and more widely disseminated forms of 'discourse analysis' will suffice since my aims are not polemical or even critical in regard to this question.

If we return to the guiding statement, given above, about the construction of the subject during the years 1756-63, another set of questions can be addressed. This concerns the choice of the period and the 'discrete discourses' discussed below. The first of these, the choice of the period, can be explained as follows. This study began by questioning the presence of a very large number of enquiries written during the eighteenth century on the topic of aesthetics, or more precisely, on the origin and causes of sublime experience. It became clear that not only was this topic extremely widely diffused - one can find it discussed in works of poetry and painting, landscape gardening and music (all of which are very obviously connected by the network of discourses which constituted aesthetics or philosophical criticism for the period) - it also absorbed and transformed a number of neighbouring but distinct areas of enquiry. Thus the topic of the sublime can not only be found in discussions of reading and speaking, of education in general, but also in political speeches and imaginative literature. This tells us something about the very widespread use of the term 'sublime' and its cognates, but it also signals something else, which, I shall argue in the third chapter, enables us to locate the discourse of the sublime.

This discourse, it seems to me, is distinguished from any of its neighbours by the fact that it has, effectively, no boundary. It is a discourse which produces, from within itself, what is habitually termed the category of the sublime and in doing so it becomes a self-transforming discourse. The only way in which it is possible to identify this newly mutated discursive form is via its propensity to produce to excess. This production to excess might be expected as the 'natural' result of a discourse on the sublime: enquiries into the nature and causes of sublime sensation were necessarily led to an investigation of the 'transport' of the sublime experience. The experience was itself defined as one which broke through a boundary, which was, in some sense at least, excessive. Hence the discourse on the sublime, in its function as an analytic discourse on excessive experience, became increasingly preoccupied with the discursive production of the excess: once it had begun to describe how an experience is sublime and what caused it, it began to create a discourse which not only explained the effect or demonstrated the mechanism by which it is produced, but also created the experiential possibility for sublime sensations. There is, then, a natural tendency for the discourse on the sublime to produce the conditions necessary for the construction of the discourse of the sublime, a discourse which produces from within itself sublime experience.

It is on account of this that many enquiries into sublimity turn to external discourses, most notably that of ethics, in order to control the discourse of analysis. I refer to this discourse on the sublime as a discursive analytic in order to distinguish it from the more common use of the word 'discourse' (which is usually taken to mean a spoken utterance, or the distinguishing feature of a

Appreciating sublimity after Turner  
Dreaming after Freud.

particular text - Burke's discourse, for example, usually refers to the distinct use of language by Burke in a particular text). The discursive analytic, as we shall see, tends to produce its own objects for analysis along with its empowered analysis of them. When it recognizes this it often reaches out for a legislating and controlling adjacent discourse in order to bring itself to law, to avoid its self-generating and excessive productions. Even when it does not recognize this it still keeps itself under control through recourse to a neighbouring legislative discourse. This sketch of aesthetics during the eighteenth century seemed to explain why ethics is nearly always summoned up by early works on the sublime, primarily those published during the first two decades, but it does not explain very adequately why this turn to ethics seems to disappear after the mid-century. Explanations which are founded in the notion that ethics simply became less important during the second half of the century seemed to lack explanatory power.

This led me to consider those works which were published around mid-century in order to investigate the possible reasons for this relatively sudden disappearance of ethics as a contextualizing and controlling discourse for works on the sublime. It is true that there are other explanations of this change in the exant literature, but these nearly always suggest that after mid-century aesthetics became dependent upon, or at least interconnected with and interested in 'psychology'. It is in relation to this argument that the emergence of the self is often claimed as the result, or one of the effects of, the enquiry into the sublime. While it would be false to maintain that aesthetics does not turn to 'psychology' after mid-century, it seems to me that this statement begs a number of very large and important questions. Mid-century aestheticians did not 'invent' psychology out of thin air, nor is the turn to it as a contextualizing discourse self-evident: a number of more powerful legislating discourses were already present, such as theology, whose neglect in this respect cannot be explained by merely intoning the argument, more often an unexamined assumption than a contextualized analysis, about the decrease in interest and power of the orthodox church in mid-eighteenth-century England. It is a matter of contemporary debate as to the extent of this falling away of the power of the church, but such arguments need not concern us at present since it is clear that enquiries into the sublime recognized the option of turning to theology and rejected it (we will see how Burke tackles this problem in the third chapter).

The turn to psychology, then, needs to be explained from within the discourse on the sublime, and from within its contextualizing discursive network. On account of this it became clear that the three major works of aesthetics published between 1757 and 1763, Burke's *Enquiry*, Gerard's *Essay on Taste*, and Kames's *Elements of Criticism*, effect this transition from a discourse on the sublime which genuflects towards ethics to one which helps produce, as much as it turns towards, psychology. The precise dates of this transition are not at issue - they are merely given as a convenient way of delimiting the period - but it also

transpires that these three texts were published during the Seven Years War; indeed they almost exactly correspond to its beginning and its end. In order to contextualize these works and to begin noting the distances between the discourse on the sublime and its neighbouring discourses, I turned, therefore, to those issues and debates which seemed to me to be very obviously of major importance and significance for the period, and which constituted one of the most powerful discourses within the network: the set of discourses on, about, and raised by the war. It was here that a number of extremely interesting connections began to emerge, but which only became visible by working the model of discourse and discursive network outlined above. For, it became clear very early on that the debates about the war, and most importantly the debt occasioned by it, hardly borrowed the same terms of argument or details of analysis, in fact hardly borrowed a phrase or a figure from works on aesthetics. Thus, it was evident from the beginning that it would be foolish to look for or suggest that the connections between these two distinct discourses were causal in any simple sense, yet the similarities between them when understood as discrete discourses are certainly apparent and, it seemed to me, of considerable importance. To put this as baldly as possible, both the discourse on the sublime and the discourse on the national debt during the Seven Years War ran into a problem of immense scale and importance which becomes legible when we see these discussions as legislative discourses. This problem was conceived as the following: how can one control a discourse which sets out to examine the ways and means for controlling an excess, the sublime experience in the case of one and the national debt in the other, when that excess is visualized by the discourse of analysis as its own product?

It is this question which forces the discourse on the sublime to a recognition of its own productive powers, and which does not so much turn to psychology as produce the object for it: it produces the autonomous subject. But, as noted above, this turn in aesthetics occurs at precisely the same time as the discourse on debt discovers that it not only helps produce the conditions under which the debt increases at an alarming and uncontrollable rate, but that it also requires an identification between the individuals who constitute the state and the debt which represents it: at precisely the same moment the discourse on debt turns to and produces the individual, the autonomous subject. In the fourth chapter this identification is described in some detail through an examination of numerous tracts on the debt; the characteristics of that debate are of less interest to the present argument than the discursive forms in which they are featured, and the overwhelming tendency to rationalize an ever-expanding debt in terms first of an oppressive and then a familiarized, and therefore defused, unlegislatable excess. The discourse on the debt effects the capitalist description of the subject – still very much with us and under which we are represented – in which the discursive excess is identified as the mark of individuality: it brings about the field of representation in which difference determines and ratifies person: difference

in and to excess becomes the defining feature of the individual and sanctions the subject. It is not possible, or desirable, to stretch this argument any further; to claim, for instance, that the discourse on the debt required a model for the containment of the excess which could be found, very conveniently, in the discourse on the sublime; nor to claim the opposite, that the discourse on the sublime required the example of the identification of the subject with the determining discourse of analysis provided by the discourse on debt. It is important to note that a causal relation would be impossible to locate, given that the very connections between these two discourses have only come to light on account of the procedures and protocols utilized in my analysis: exactly those methodologies developed in order to take account of the non-commensurability of these two areas of enquiry, their non-causative connections. The final turn of my argument will address this and attempt to investigate its own excess and the relation between the sublime and debt as these categories are used in the following discussion. We will need, however, to examine the detail of these discourses and of the subject as it is positioned by the discursive excess before being able to take full measure of the sceptical force of this method and these comments.

To return to the matter of the first part of the book, one thing which does emerge with some clarity is that by the end of the war the autonomous subject was not only required by two extremely prevalent discourses, but that it was to some extent the product of both of them, even though each required the subject for different ends. More important than this, though, is the contemporary recognition of a particular discursive analytic, which, in the terminology I am using, produces from within itself its own excess. This excess can be identified with the subject in the years following the war, and is the topic for the second part of this study. I do not mean to suggest that the subject is only present to the areas of enquiry investigated in each of the three main chapters of the second part. Rather, I have set out to examine how the subject is produced within those areas, given that all three – discussions on speaking, viewing pictures, and reading – seem to need or produce a legislative discourse which controls the excess, a discourse of control on the subject.

In this second part of the book a further set of questions takes on considerable importance: how and in what manner does a discourse legislate a practice? What is the relation between a 'theory', even if not entirely understood or recognized as such, and its presumed 'practice'? Here the specificity of the present analysis becomes extremely important, for I do not mean to present an analysis of the eighteenth-century context as if it were innocent in regard to our own legislative theories and policed practices. That this is a large project, if not a utopian dream, is more than clear to me: the reasons for the development of the present study, however, have been determined to a large extent by my belief that at the present time we lack a specifically historical method of understanding discursive transformations, and it is my wager that such a method will enlighten an

understanding of our own contemporary hierarchies and technologies of subjectivity. I have attempted to describe how those hierarchies and technologies were articulated within the past in order to reflect upon the present, in order to demonstrate how the past looks from our present discursive network, and to suggest some ways of re-inscribing that history within our contemporaneity, by which I do not mean that we can learn from history but that we can discover something about the present through history writing. Consequently, when I consider a wide range of texts on the teaching and practice of reading published during the second half of the century I am less concerned with the 'realities' of that practice, as to whether or not men or women read in the ways I suggest they did, than in the statements made about the practice by reading 'theory'. I term these texts 'theoretical' in the full knowledge that they did not call themselves this (it should be noted, however, that the works on perspective dealt with in chapter 8 very frequently did call attention to both the distinction between theory and practice, and their claims to theoretical status), in order to place the relations between the practice of reading, as far as we can discover it, and the texts about the practice in a particular framework. This framework is, put very simply, one in which a text attempts to legislate or police a practice. It does not concern me whether or not women really did read trash novels, but that (usually male) theorists claimed that they did. It is only when we begin to question the relations between this 'theory' and the practice it purports to describe and police that it becomes possible to note that the 'real' may well have been constituted rather differently, and that men, not women, made up the majority of the trash novel reading public. It should be pointed out here, however, that I do not see this as a better version of the past, as a more accurate description of the reading public during the eighteenth century since a further question needs to be addressed concerning the status of that 'real' in the above sentence. For, having noted that reading theory constructed a 'real' in which women read licentious texts only to veil a further 'reality' that in fact men read these books, we need to consider the problem by which 'theory' represented to itself a situation, be it real or imaginary, in which male readers could or did read trash novels. In other words, we have not revealed a more accurate 'real' but have, rather, exposed one of the mechanisms by which reading theory imagined its real, produced its fantasy 'truth'. What is of interest and importance here is the means by which it became possible to allow reading theory to articulate this imaginary, to speak and visualize, perform and place in the frame of the gaze its powers of control and legislation. In all this it would seem to be clear enough that this 'insight' has been enabled by the framework of analysis in which the relationships between a theory and a practice are brought into tension and investigated.

Yet this does not exhaust the determining criteria of the analytical framework, for one possible description of the object (the reading public during the eighteenth century) takes the relations between theory and practice at face

value, just as it takes the contemporary eighteenth-century descriptions of the reading activity as an accurate record of the practice, a picture of the real. In chapter 10 I argue that while such readings are possible a more complex way of relating the descriptions of the activity to the theory leads to a greater understanding of the theory, and a fuller description of its relation to the practice. The object for our analysis, then, is clearly not the past, but the interconnections between two discourses, historically distinct but contaminated by the present of analysis, and their participation within the larger network of the discourses informing, controlling, enabling and requiring the subject.

This, then, is the topic for the second part of the book, which does not attempt to make causal connections between the discourse of the sublime and theories of speaking, viewing and reading. Once again, it seems to me that if the model I am proposing is to produce new insights into the contextualization of discourses such illumination will not come from a redrawn causative description of the relations between discrete discourses. To end up arguing that the discourse of the sublime pervades every discourse in the years following the war, that it is the mark of the subject for the second half of the century, would have been, in very obvious ways, deeply satisfying; unfortunately it would also have been unresponsive to what I take as the full force of a sceptical historical method since it would have reimposed the enabling criteria on the material brought to light by the analysis. In contrast, I have attempted to demonstrate that with a more flexible procedure for analysing historically determined discourses it becomes possible to note connections and overlaps at the constitutive level of the discourse. In this way the discourse of the sublime can be seen as one of the discourses present to the network which defines and enables the subject at a particular moment during the eighteenth century, and when seen from a particular perspective. It is, of course, as important that this perspective tells us as much about our present needs and desires in relation to the analytical procedures and protocols of historical enquiry as about the emergence of subjectivity during the eighteenth century in England.

At this point it is important to register something about the ways in which I use the term subject, and what I take to be the object of my own descriptions. This introduction has already made the point that the subject is taken as a feature of discourse throughout this study. Some further comments about this may delay possible misappropriations of the material presented. The construction of subjectivity, or person, will be investigated entirely in terms of the positions given it, the places it occupies and in which it appears in various discourses. In this way I hope to be able to demonstrate that the subject can be taken as a facet of or a counter within particular discourses as well as a term or concept stretched across a specific discursive network. It is clearly a partial description of subjectivity and is not to be taken as definitive.

This means that the subject as we might more readily understand the term, as the agent of action, the intending user of discourse has been ignored and to

some extent disfigured by my analysis. Subjects in the eighteenth century, it might be remarked, do not appear as positionalities in discrete discourses, are not identified with the excess of any discursive analytic. They do things, they eat and drink and speak and so forth; they are organized into a set of social relations, class relations and political relations. Furthermore, the subject, it might justly be retorted, stands for and means different things dependent upon where a particular subject is located within these hierarchies, whether or not it is male or female, old or young, noble or peasant. While this commonsense objection needs to be addressed if we are to mount a comprehensive history of the concept of subjectivity it does not bear upon the present study, at least in so far as its prefigurative modes of argument are ranged.

The initiating perception of this argument begins by noting that while 'real' subjects are the agents of a history of event, as well of discourse, the historical investigation of their actions and speech is predicated upon the assumption that to be a subject, within the space demarcated for it, was the same for the historical period of enquiry as for our own contemporaneity. This study sets out to investigate that assumption and to construct a set of possible subject positions for the eighteenth century.

Another way of describing this is to note that the subject in our terms functions as trope of history and in history, it organizes both the discourses within this book, and the discursive network within the eighteenth century I set out to examine. The subject as figure works through the text in complicated ways, generating a kind of metaphoric of the subject which is only ever offered as a defigurative reading of the historical context. Something of its power can be noted in the opening dream and the three short chapters in Part II. I should also add that it is more than clear to me, at least, that the discursive network discussed in this book is restricted; it neglects a very large number of discrete discourses ranged into further networks which all singly and in conjunction positioned the subject differently. Further work might look to the discourses of politics and medicine or the institutions of the family and the state in order to supplement the descriptions offered here. This might lead to further figurative emplotments of the body and the subject, to investigations of the current physiognomic, legal, penal and so forth. Such extensions of the current argument might tackle the question of 'who speaks, views, reads' in slightly different ways, taking the perspective from the agent and insisting on the class, gender, economic affiliations of the 'real' person. The last two chapters engage this elaboration in ways that are, I hope, genuinely responsive to the sceptical force of the entire argument.

In order to distance my working of the term subject from its more commonsense use I have resorted to the cumbersome composite 'subject effect' or 'subject position' when the sense of the discursive description of the subject seems to need reinforcement. I have not used this rather awkward term throughout since it can from now on be taken to be the meaning I attach to the

term 'subject'; this has the happy effect of minimizing the distraction of neologism or unnecessary technical vocabulary. It should be pointed out that the effects of this delimitation are discussed in the final chapter, with, I hope, both productive results and scrupulous self-criticism.

The above could be said to be an excursus on the theory of the present work; a few comments about its practice may provide some help in the assembly of its multiple parts. While the above comments point out the large-scale orientation of the following pages they may leave the reader with no real guide for locating and following the precise arguments contained within, especially given the fact that at least three different arguments are energized, to differing degrees, at the same time. These three arguments can be set out plainly here, for they will never be so baldly and unproblematically extractable from the detail of comments in the chapters following. The first argument, clearly attached to the comments about the theory of the present work above, concerns the nature of a discourse of something, and the methods and procedures we might use in order to investigate a specifically historical discursive network. In regard to this argument it is clear that my distinction between a discourse on something and one of something is a hard concept, by which I mean to refer to the absolute distinction it sets up between two forms of discursivity. Such hard concepts usually distort the 'reality' of which they conceive; such is the case here, for the utilization of this hard concept orders the discursive network in a particularly rigid fashion, thereby eliding or erasing the softer connections between and within discourses highlighted by other weaker descriptive concepts and methodologies. The reason why I stick to this otherwise brutal analytical tool is to bring into focus the production of an excess by the discourse of something. A large portion of Part I of the book is concerned with the description and analysis of eighteenth-century aesthetics exclusively from this perspective and in the service of this argument.

The second argument pursued throughout, and clearly enabled by the first, concerns the emergence of the subject, understood in the terms set out above, within a small number of discourses during the eighteenth century in England. Here the restricted historical period features as a control upon the argument, which in its hardest form (although never invoked) leads to a description of the emergence of the subject entirely in terms of the discursive network present to the period of the Seven Years War. This argument is also connected to the first through the analysis of the discursive excess, since, although I do not wish to make an identity between the excess and the subject, in some respects it is useful to regard the subject as precisely the result or overplus of a discourse of something, and hence adjacent to the discursive excess. It would have been possible to attach other names to this excess, and to sketch in some detail the particular excesses produced by debt or by aesthetics. I have not pursued this line of enquiry because the argument is concerned with the mechanism by which a

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discourse produces an excess: the reasons for this should be clear from the perspective of the first argument outlined above – I am less interested in what the excess might be, in giving it a name, than in the investigation of discursive propensity to produce excess.

This brings into focus the third argument which concerns the relations between theory and practice, and the difficulties a discourse of something has with an excess which it produces but which it cannot control. In Part II of the book three areas of enquiry are examined in which the relations between theory and practice are various. These three arguments are, then, interconnected at this most general level, but they are certainly not connected, at least in so far as I see the situation, in a set of causal or even logical connections in the detail of the various chapters. Discourse, subject and theory are all part of my discursive network, and are the major controlling concepts at work in my analytical procedures: they are, however, more rhetorically than logically linked, if rhetoric is taken as the prefigurative determinant of a language. This leads to my attempting to say at least three things at the same time, clearly an impossible feat, and because of this the reader may be in some confusion at times as to which of the three controlling arguments is being pursued, and to sense something of a high-wire act in process. The success of this balancing can only be judged by the reader, as can the results of it set out in the conclusion.

As if this three-dimensional argument were not already too unwieldy and impractical one further difficulty must be addressed, the connection between the three parts of the book. I hope that it is clear from these introductory remarks that the connections between the first and the second parts of this book are indirect: they follow, in so far as they can, the complex interweaving of a discursive network, tracing some dominant figures, such as the body, across different discursive fields while resisting a causal description of their relations. This can be seen as the resistance internal to my own theory and expectations of analysis.

Part I attempts to isolate a discourse of the sublime in terms of the functions of what I have termed above a discursive analytic. It attempts to argue that works on the topic of sublime sensation, when seen as such a discursive analytic, write out another set of issues concerned with the question of closure as it is posed to the analytic discourse itself. Chapter 2 traces the ways in which the eighteenth-century discussion of the sublime became an auto-legislative discourse, turning away from the modes of authentication found in prior discursive forms, such as ethics or theology, and in so doing noting how it became a legislative discourse about the objects it takes for, and as examples of, analysis. In common with most examples of legislative discourses the discourse on the sublime is very restrictive in respect to the objects it positions as the focus of its descriptive, analytic and legislative work. In brief, eighteenth-century aesthetics can be understood as constructing a description of sublimity which restricts the types and forms of experience that are held to be generative of sublime sensation. In chapter 3 the

difference between the discourse on the sublime and what I term the discourse of the sublime is described from the standpoint of the adequacy of a discourse to set a perimeter within which its legislating and legitimating manoeuvres can be seen to be effective.

It is also suggested that this mutation of eighteenth-century enquiries into the sublime could be placed in a historically specific discursive context. Thus the legislative discourse of the sublime is placed next to a concurrent set of enquiries about the national debt during the course of the Seven Years War in chapter 4. Here I suggest that these enquiries also generate a discourse which examines its own limits of description and analysis, and which also produce from within, that is discursively, an excess which was the mark of the discourse's legislative limit. The excess for these works is to be seen in terms of the identification of the individual or subject with certain institutional descriptions and functions of the state or nation. In the juxtaposition of these two chapters I hope to show that similar methods and ways of producing this excess are articulated by the discourse of debt and the discourse of the sublime – while taking care to note that the subject produced by these two discourses is not necessarily the same, serving similar ends and needs.

In the second part of this book attention moves to focus on how the subject is also the product of a number of related enquiries, which again produce, require and examine subjectivity for differing reasons. In this second set of discourses the excess of the first part is seen more insistently in terms of the overplus of theory over practice. Here it is taken as axiomatic that a theory legislates a practice, and that it produces the activities over which it rules. Theory in this account does not set out to describe or codify a practice, it is not an empirically based operation, although it may present itself as such, but a generative system which requires a practice, produced by the system, in order to function. Three kinds of theoretical discourse are discussed in Part II all of which identify the subject as the overplus of the theory/practice division.

In works on elocution discussed in chapter 6 the political subject represented by the voice that emanates from the body and the gestures surrounding the physical space of it is seen to be policed by a theory of public speech which determined a practice in the social that was carefully measured and distanced. This practice, which we should note does not have a privileged relation to the 'real' of eighteenth-century social space, nor does it describe that 'real' in anything like 'objective' terms, is founded upon a set of principles, most easily given under the rubric of propriety and property, which legislate the social space of the subject: they determine how and why and where a body should be displayed, the precise manner in which it should move and occupy physical space.

In works on perspective drawing discussed in chapter 8 the theoretical discourse performs a slightly different task and has a slightly different status. Here the theory clearly does not produce the practice; indeed, as we shall see, its

almost total lack of transformation through the entire century suggests that its own version of the practice of viewing was almost entirely phantasmatic. In this way perspective theory can be seen as a very weak form of legislative discourse, attaining a very small degree of penetration into its surrounding discursive network. Its work was to repeatedly state a set of rules which determine the distance of the subject, and to articulate a certain ethics or politics of viewing against an unruly social practice. Something different again will be found to be the case in the relations between the theory and practice of reading outlined in chapter 10. Here, I shall argue that the theory produced an imaginary practice in order to disguise the 'real' of the reading scene; it does this by legislating the reading of texts across the bar of gender, in so doing cleaving the textual into gender-defined categories. The deployment of theory in this case is both more effective and more obviously required; effective since the theoretical distinction between masculine and feminine kinds of text and practices of reading both produced a myth of considerable proportions about the 'real' of reading, a myth that theory told itself again and again, and required by a very extensive change in the composition of the reading public, and in the aims, needs and desires of readers.

This last case is the most complex since the practice imagined by the theory and required by it in order for it to be seen as a legislative discourse, is inserted within the 'real' in contradictory ways. We might almost say that the theory/practice division itself helped change the wider set of relations articulated by reading theory – society, sexuality and the subject – since this hard concept instituted a number of binary divisions which were increasingly taken as *a priori* distinctions in the real. This is a complication which has arisen on account of the distinction being made here between a 'real' of history, that which we cannot recover but to which we gesture as an authenticating move, and the real of the practice positioned by a theoretical discourse.

A potential misconception about the argument I am making in regard to the subject should be defused here. I do not wish to argue in the sequence of chapters in the second part of this book that the subject can *only* be found in theories of speaking, viewing, and reading in the years following the Seven Years War: I do not wish to make a crude kind of Foucaultian argument about the break in discursive orders occasioned by the war and its surrounding debates on debt management. Rather, I wish to pursue the logic of the restrictive historical argument set out above, and to test its limits. This is done in three distinct ways in the three chapters. It is only in the chapter on elocution where the 'rupture' or break argument has any force, since it would appear that at least in works on elocution things do change after the somewhat arbitrary date of the end of the war. This restrictive reading is deliberately destroyed, however, in the chapter on perspective, where I point out that perspective theory *remained the same* for an entire century. The subject, in so far as it is positioned by perspective theory, is clearly *not* a unique product of the mid-century. The purpose of this chapter,

however, is to examine a discursive node, about and/or organized around perspective theory, which would seem to have been highly resistant to change, and almost oblivious to the larger social, cultural and political events that determined its historical specificity.

In the same way and directed towards a similar self-investigative mode of argument, the last example, that of reading theory, breaks down a further enabling assumption of the larger argument of this book, that of the discrete discourse, and attempts to discuss a set of prescriptive comments about the practice of reading in a wide range of texts, all loosely connected with education, without regard to chronology. The argument here covers the entire century and beyond, and attempts to put into question the procedures by which a discrete discourse is isolated in order to note its connections with its neighbours. These three chapters, then, are intended to interrogate my own methods and practices of historicizing the discourse of the sublime.

In all these ways the second part of the book is to be taken as an investigation of the results of the first. There it is suggested that the discourse on the sublime and on the debt both point towards the generation of the subject from within two specific discursive analytics. This is historicized in a very narrow way by restricting the materials placed in apposition to the period of the Seven Years War. Having arrived at a description of the subject in terms of a discursive excess the second part of the book attempts to defigure this analysis. In an important sense the subject figures the discussion in chapters 5 – 10, it informs the gaze of the enquiry, it determines what is looked at and how. In the ways suggested above the sceptical frame of my analytic procedures now becomes important as the figure of the subject is played out across the topics of reading, viewing and speaking only to be subjected to rigorous defiguration. It is only by folding back within the discursive analytic that which is produced by it – here, the discursive excess identified as the subject position – that it becomes possible to investigate the presuppositions and prefigurations of my argument. It is this method I take to be exemplified by the appositional and tmetic placing of the second part of the book.

It should also be noted that the methodology is itself cumulative; this is to say that the argument is not cumulative but the process of it, the means by which it is exemplified and prosecuted. In Part III a return to the sublime is effected via an interrogation of the everted boundary which frames the entire study. In this way the conclusion stages its own reading in order to examine how the subject is inserted within the boundaries of this discursive analytic, and, I hope, on account of this is more knowing about its own horizon, its own speaking seeing, its own trajectory and its own excess.

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PART I



During the course of the eighteenth century some few thousand works were published in Britain on the general topic of aesthetics. The object we take to be the focus of this project of enquiry, the aesthetic, has, it hardly needs saying, different contours and points of reference for us than it had for eighteenth-century writers. Nevertheless, we can recognize some of the features of the eighteenth-century debate: the question of aesthetic pleasure and taste, the investigation and erection of criteria upon which to base judgements about objects, be they deemed within the domain of 'art' or nature, and the ranking of the various 'artistic' endeavours into an 'ordering of the arts' in which landscape gardening, for example, is recognized to be an inferior or lower level enterprise than poetry.

However, once these general features have been listed – we should note in passing that it would be possible to elucidate a longer list if required – the similarities between our own notions of 'aesthetics' and those taken as the basis for rigorous and, at times it seems, interminable debate during the entire course of the eighteenth century come to an abrupt end. Where we increasingly remove discussion of aesthetics proper to the philosophy schools and profession of academic philosophy, the eighteenth-century theorist moved in precisely the opposite direction, so that the enquiry into what is beautiful or sublime became progressively a topic for general discussion, articulated in areas of discursive activity which could not be further removed from the academic discipline of philosophy. Again, while we have learnt to devalue the aesthete, reserving the term for mild approbation, eighteenth-century writers held up the man of taste as the exemplar of the highest possible level of cultural and social rank.

It would be possible to sketch most easily why these differences and distances have arisen by drawing the nineteenth century into our explanation, thereby constructing a historical framework in which eighteenth-century aesthetics might be seen to transmute into the aestheticism associated with certain nineteenth-century artistic endeavours and theories, which in turn transform via

the reaction against them in the twentieth century. This would be a historical description of the aesthetic, as a philosophical term and cognitive category, which might tell us something about the development of theories of art and its appreciation from the eighteenth century to the present day. The following study does not attempt to address this large-scale history, although it does point to one way of understanding the transformation of the aesthetic for the eighteenth century into political economy in the nineteenth. This is to register the fact that aesthetics, for this study, is to be understood as a discourse, not as an a historical philosophical concept stretching from Plato to Wittgenstein, and that furthermore this discourse is specific to a particular time and place, eighteenth-century Britain.

I began by noting that a few thousand works on the topic of aesthetics were published during the course of the century. To state this, however, begs a number of important questions. For example, the range of these enquiries is far from the same: Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is a very different text from any of the periodical essays dealing with the topic published in the *Spectator*, *Adventurer*, *Connoisseur*, *World*, *Guardian*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Tatler*, *Lounger*, or *Mirror*, all of which carried essays on aesthetics understood in terms of a general field of enquiry – we should also note that this list of periodicals containing such essays could also be much enlarged. This difference is not merely one of size and scope, for the topic of address itself undergoes transformation during the period. This transformation, however, is not primarily to be seen in relation to a linear concept of historical change, for, as this chapter sets out to demonstrate, the field of enquiry into aesthetics is a discursive network, containing a number of discrete discourses, which change unevenly and at different rates, sometimes with regard to neighbouring contextualizing discourses, and sometimes oblivious to them. Furthermore, eighteenth-century aesthetics, when taken as a discursive network, can be understood as questioning the ground of that network and investigating the ways in which it saw itself not merely as a topic for debate and enquiry but also as a discursive form; something which pervaded discussion of poetry and theology, the natural and the artistic, and was stretched out into manners, forms of address, politics, topography, painting and so on.

Consequently we may begin by noting the range and diversity of the field of enquiry which includes at one end of the century Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the original of our ideas of Beauty and virtue* (1725), a philosophical treatment of the nature of beauty articulated by a governing ethics of social and personal action, to Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) at the other, a 'psychological' treatise interested in the various effects on the human mind caused by objects taken to be external and sensations internal to it. This, however, is to say almost nothing in relation to the size and extent of the field of enquiry: it hardly signals the immense persistence of interest, still less the

investment in regulating, defining and legislating the area of human activity associated with, as well as articulated in, aesthetic experience. It would be possible to list some of the works, along with their characteristics, which participate in this unique eighteenth-century debate, but such lists can be found elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> More useful for our purposes is a contrastive method, by which one treatise on the sublime is compared with another in order to begin to determine the features of this discursive network.

From this very general opening it is clear that we face something of a definitional problem as to what we should include within the topic of aesthetics and what we should consign to other kinds of enquiry. The works classified by Draper, for example, as 'on aesthetics', covering as they do the entire century, and ranging from 'general works' through architecture and gardening, pictorial and plastic arts, literature and drama, to music, are not all 'about the same thing, at least to the same extent. We need, then, a working sense of what the aesthetic deals with, what it addresses, positions. Thus at the most general level we might ask what is eighteenth-century aesthetics about? This question raises as many further questions as it might answer, as all such questions tend to do, nevertheless a general formulation here will be helpful for the following discussion. If we take the entire field of enquiry, the limits of which have been sketched above, we may say that the enquiry into aesthetics during the period is about the relationship between a theory and the objects it describes and analyses.

This, of course, is too general and wide-ranging a definition for it to be of much use, but it does make clear the fact that the obsessive enquiry into the causes and effects of 'sublime' sensations or objects is merely the pre-text for this larger and more problematic topic. Thus, while many, if not most of the works published during the century on aesthetics could be said to be 'about' the sublime, taken in a very simple sense, about its effects and causes, its origins and associations, to describe them as only about this, or about this to the same extent, or for the same purposes would be to erase the topography of the discursive network which includes enquiries into painting and poetry, gardening and music, includes discussions of the bases of taste and moral action, and produces strictures for the pursuit of any number of activities from reading to social conversation.

However, in spite of the comments made earlier about linear historical description, it is clear that some form of historical or chronological description of the entire field does enable certain features of these texts to become visible,

<sup>1</sup> The standard bibliography by John Draper, *Eighteenth Century English Aesthetics* (New York, 1968), lists over 1200 items, but is, in fact, far from exhaustive. Andrew Ashfield has assembled a bibliography containing more than 6000 entries. Another perspective is added by taking the word 'sublime' and examining its various uses during the period. This had been done by T.E.B. Wood in his *The Word 'Sublime' and its context, 1650–1760* (The Hague, 1972).

even as it takes as a given the object and nature of these enquiries.<sup>2</sup> Such a description enables us to notice that not only are Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747) and Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) close to each other in terms of chronology, but that they are also both related to two similarly temporally proximate texts whose slightly different concerns are signalled in their more specific titles, Courtney Melmoth's *The Sublime and Beautiful of Scripture* (1777) and Richard Stack's *An Essay on Sublimity of Writing* (1787). This might lead us to note that while these four texts all participate within the general project of eighteenth-century aesthetics, the twenty or so years which separate the two pairs mark a difference in terms of the scope of the enquiry. While there is clearly a topic for investigation signalled by the common use of the term 'sublime' the features and alignments of that topic would appear to have changed over time. This, of course, is an extremely crude and low-level observation based solely upon the titles of these works.

If we now take only a very small departure from works that signal their participation in this project through the appearance of the word 'sublime' in their titles and look at those that use the word taste, such as Cooper's *Letters concerning Taste* (1755), or Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759), while we may confidently say that these treatises are concerned with the general topic of aesthetics, we may not quite so easily fit them into the same category as the previous set. When we cast the net much wider, and begin including Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) or Beattie's *Dissertations moral and critical* (1783) it becomes much more difficult to include these works under the general rubric of works 'on the sublime', even though all of them deal in some measure with this topic, be it from the aspect of writing or literature, landscape or virtuous action. It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how they might all be understood as within the discursive network of the discourse on the sublime.

No more need be said in order to substantiate the claim that the topic of the sublime is generally displaced throughout a range of eighteenth-century enquiries; indeed it could be said to be one of the informing concepts of the age, a part of the 'spirit of the age', in a slightly old-fashioned locution. It is this more nebulous and ubiquitous thing which eventually subsumes the sublime as topic, as object of enquiry, and replaces an empirical investigation into the forms, causes and effects of the sublime with a discourse which itself is, or produces, or inhabits, or exhibits the sublime. This is what I term the transformation of the discourse on the sublime to the discourse of the sublime, and I want to

<sup>2</sup> Intellectual history very often takes as given its designated field of enquiry, a position that is increasingly coming under severe scrutiny; see for example Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca, 1983). If one wanted to begin with a pre-given definition of eighteenth-century aesthetics, one might turn to Samuel H. Monk's *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Michigan, 1935), or to Wellek's *History of Criticism* (London, 1955–66).

understand such a transformation as taking place during a specific historical conjuncture, and to see it as determined by, at least in part, the contamination of the discourse on the sublime by neighbouring discourses within the larger network. This mutation or subsumption of the sublime as topic or object for enquiry is to be seen, therefore, as a product of the larger discursive network, and to result from the predominantly discursive frictions and movements which animate all such networks. It is not, therefore, solely the product of the enquiry into the sublime, and cannot be understood simply in reference to the material of that discourse and its objects of analysis. This, to put the matter in slightly less idiosyncratic terms, is to see the change in eighteenth-century aesthetics noted above in a wider context than studies on the sublime. It is to breach an internal history of the sublime in order to effect a discursive description of it.

These points are necessary in order to follow the sequence of the chapters in Part I of this book, for it should by now be more than apparent that I am not addressing the same topic, the same object of enquiry or discussion as those works which have given us the defining characteristics of the eighteenth-century sublime. These works have, by and large, treated the subject either from a literary point of view or from the standpoint of intellectual history, and have tended to focus on the use made by the imaginative literature of the period of the concept of sublimity. While I do not want to give the impression that these works have no points of contact with the present study, still less that they are without considerable interest, I do, nevertheless, wish to stress that my own approach has been very different, and has led to different conceptualizations of the topic.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, I will not address the intricacies of the eighteenth-century debate, either in regard to a particular text or author, or in relation to the wider issues perceived by that debate. Considerations about the location of the sublime, for example, as to whether it inhabits the external object or the internal perceptive mechanisms will not arise. Nor, for example, will I be concerned about the differences between one man's sublime and another's beautiful. So much for what I will not consider: what will occupy the central discussion of this chapter is

<sup>3</sup> The standard work on the subject is Monk, *The Sublime*. The following studies come in its wake: W. J. Hippie, *The Beautiful, The Sublime, & The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, 1957); Margorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infnite* (Ithaca, 1959); Ernest Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Berkeley, 1960); David Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lexington, 1972); William Price Albrecht, *The Sublime Pleasures of Tragedy: A Study of Critical Theory from Dennis to Keats* (Lawrence, KS, 1975); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore, 1976); and Steven Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985). I see the following argument in terms of its being adjacent to these works and others already published on the topic of the sublime, and will address some of the issues raised by this sense of adjacency in the last chapter.

an insistent attempt to describe and analyse works on aesthetics as a discrete discourse, a discourse not constructed upon the middle ground of a common topic for enquiry – the organizing principle of Hipple's book, for example – but upon the recognition that the enquiry has no object. This statement will become clearer as we progress, here it should signal the fact that the present study is concerned primarily with the functions of particular discourses – most notably that on the sublime – and in describing those discourses in terms of their propensity to produce a further discursive analytic, which I have characterized as the transformation from a discourse on something to a discourse of something. So much for the general outline of this chapter; we may now turn to the specific issues.

#### THE PROJECT OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AESTHETICS.

It is often remarked that eighteenth-century theories on the sublime begin in ethics: the ethical systems of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, for example, are often taken as the first examples of an enquiry specifically into the nature and causes of the aesthetic, but if either writer can be said to be interested in aesthetics *per se* that interest is clearly tempered by their profoundly ethical standpoints. Indeed, Hutcheson's *An Inquiry concerning beauty, order, harmony, design* (1725) is almost exclusively concerned with the moral dimension of the aesthetic sense, so much so that it might be better understood as a work of ethics rather than aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> This ethical dimension, however, is extremely persistent, and can be found just as easily in many texts published during the last two decades of the century.<sup>5</sup> However, if this topic for investigation begins in ethics it receives its real impetus from rhetorical study, since it is the appearance of the three translations of Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime*, in 1712, 1724, and 1739, which frames most of the debate until mid-century, and generates to a certain extent the specific eighteenth-century obsession with the connection between the sublime of the

<sup>4</sup> These comments are intended to underline the tendency to place or situate the object field of analysis, to read a treatise as one on something, or belonging to a particular discipline or field of enquiry. This tendency is explicable in terms of our necessary limitation of the field of enquiry; however the ways in which the field is sectioned or cut up are rarely questioned or altered. It is of course, one of the tasks of the 'new' histories, of women for example, to re-order the object field in order to tell a different story about the past. The present work seeks both to re-order its field, eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, and to investigate the new problems which arise with any re-ordering.

<sup>5</sup> See, among others, Thomas Percival, *Moral and Literary Dissertations* (London, 1789); William Thomson, *An enquiry into the elementary principles of beauty in the works of nature and art* (London, 1798); Thomas Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature* (London, 1797).

text, sublimity in writing, and the natural sublime, the sublime sensations produced by the experience of mountains and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

It is also commonly remarked that this ethico-rhetorical enterprise soon develops into something else, which has no obvious label, but can be referred to most efficiently by the term empirical psychology.<sup>7</sup> For the debates surrounding the sublime show, during the course of the century, a marked tendency towards the adoption and adaptation of a theory of mind that has most commonly been associated with psychology. This particular narrative states that where, for example, in the early decades of the century sublime sensation might be explained in terms of the qualities inhering in the object, through recourse to a taxonomy of the natural which used vocabulary such as 'grandeur', 'simplicity', 'distinctness' and so on, towards the end of the century such explanations would be phrased in terms of the interior workings of the human mind, through recourse to a vocabulary of the passions, sentiment or imagination. On account of this it is often held that theories of the sublime develop hand-in-hand with empirical psychology, and that these explanations of the sublime provide the impetus for the investigation into the internal workings of the mind.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the century debates concerned with the location of sublimity, either in terms of the external object or the internal sense, had by and large died out, leaving the place of contest within theories of aesthetics to a wider conceptualization of sublimity which included social, cultural, and artistic explanations of aesthetic experience. Two texts can be said to signal the end of eighteenth-century aesthetics in the following respect: they close the debate on the relations between internal and external causes of sublime sensation and they point towards a more complex social understanding of the interrelations between ethics, rhetoric and aesthetics. It might be argued in concord with these two signal texts that such interrelations were the real subject of eighteenth-century aesthetics from the beginning; these texts are Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* published in 1790, and Richard Payne Knight's *An analytical inquiry into the principles of taste* (1805). The nineteenth century proper is characterized by what Weiskel terms 'the romantic sublime', but this I see as less a variant of the eighteenth-century enquiry than a

<sup>6</sup> As Neil Hertz points out, interest in the Longinian text decreases in proportion to the appropriation of its rhetorical forms as standing for the experiential. Hertz makes this comment in an extremely powerful and influential essay 'A Reading of Longinus', collected in *The End Of The Line* (New York, 1985), pp. 1–20.

<sup>7</sup> It should be pointed out that the narrative form embedded here, of 'development' and progression is explicitly refused by Hipple. See his introduction to *The Beautiful, The Sublime, & The Picturesque*, pp. 3–10.

<sup>8</sup> Monk in his pioneering study sets out precisely this trajectory 'toward the subjectivism of Kant': *The Sublime*, p. 4.

completely distinct discourse which borrows many terms from it. It is not to be seen as a continuation or outgrowth of the discourse on the sublime since it functions and situates itself in very different ways. If one were to locate the continuation of the eighteenth-century debate it would be in the social and economic theory of the 1840s where one would find the same obsessions with the interrelations between ethics, aesthetics and rhetoric, and that debate would more likely be understood historically in terms of the discourse of politics, or political economy, than aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> The above, then, could be said to describe the trajectory of eighteenth-century aesthetics, or the discourse on the sublime, from ethics via rhetoric and empirical psychology to political economy. It should be clear from the tenor of my comments that I do not want to say anything about this particular teleological description of eighteenth-century aesthetics. For one thing this kind of narrative is quite outdated, even though its trace can still be found in Weiskel's book, while for another its aims, those of the widest scope intellectual history, are no longer commonly pursued in that discipline. I give this sketch in order to place the present work, and to note that I am proposing nothing particularly new in attempting to demonstrate the 'rise of the subject' in eighteenth-century theories of aesthetics. What I am suggesting as a new departure is a consideration of the topic from the perspective of the distinction between a discourse on the sublime and a discourse of it, and that this distinction enables us to note something about the subject of eighteenth-century aesthetics, the subject of and in the sublime, which has hitherto been unremarked.

I shall argue in the following pages that the discourse of the sublime is a discursive analytic, a discourse that attempts to describe and analyse objects that are exterior to it – in this case the external world, and certainly no different from the discourse on the sublime – but which constantly phrases its explanations and analyses in terms that can only be understood as indications of internal effects, which is to say internal to itself. Hence, the discourse of the sublime effectively describes and analyses itself, it explains how sublime sensation arises in the individual by recourse to the workings of the discourse of analysis. It is distinct from the discourse on the sublime in one crucial respect: it cannot authenticate its statements and analyses through reference to an external authority since its analytic procedure is based upon an internalization of all analysis and description: it is self-reflexive in the first instance, making reference to itself as discourse in its explanatory procedures rather than to adjacent or prior discourses, objects in the world or human subjectivity. The discourse on the sublime places external authority as the control for its analyses and descriptions, as the reference point that authenticates its findings. This external

<sup>9</sup> These are clearly large statements which are in need of some justification and amplification, which I propose to provide towards the end of this chapter by comparing an early eighteenth-century set of comments on the sublime with Coleridge's. Such a comparison has obvious pitfalls, but I shall leave discussion of them until then.

authority may take many forms, from the theological to the social, but its legitimating power is always present and capable of being summoned up.

The discourse of the sublime produces sublimity from within itself, and is, therefore, more than a commentary upon sublime sensation. For this reason it is able to formulate sublimity in terms of discursivity; hence not only does the location of the sublime experience shift from the external world to the interior mind – as we have already noted in our crude history above – but it also becomes part of the text which locates, analyses and describes the experience. It is in this sense that I want to understand the discourse of the sublime as a theoretical discourse, one which is self-reflexively aware, that produces the objects it sets out to control, determine, legislate and so on. In this way the sublime can be seen in terms of an effect of the discursive analytic, not a quantity or quality described by that discourse and located either in the world or in the mind by it. The next chapter will outline in some detail this discourse of the sublime, but in order to isolate it from competing and contextualizing discourses I will attempt to describe its difference from the discourse it has most in common with and within which it can most easily be identified as emergent, the discourse on the sublime.

It is right to begin with Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime*, since its power over eighteenth-century aestheticians is considerable, and if there could be said to be any beginning to the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime it would be with the various translations of this classical text.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that Longinus's text was certainly known to seventeenth-century writers, for whom it seems to have held little interest; at least it failed to stimulate the need to cite this text as authority. In contrast to this, what is extremely conspicuous in the eighteenth-century context is the use of Longinus as prior authority, as some form of authenticating origin. This procedure, by which one legitimates one's statements by claiming prior authority is, of course, not new; it is, however, noteworthy that the eighteenth-century discussion of the sublime should begin in this way, and that it should take Longinus as its *ur-text* since, as Neil Hertz points out in his careful reading of the inner logic of the treatise, it is more characterized by duplicity and slippage than clear and careful exposition.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps one way of understanding the interest in this difficult classical text is to see it in relation to the growth of textual criticism and commentary throughout the century. In fact the Longinian method of citation of literary

<sup>10</sup> The treatise has had many translations into English: the most widely read during the eighteenth century was that of William Smith, first published in 1739 and into its fifth edition by 1800. There were earlier translations by Weiskel in 1712 and John Putney in 1680.

<sup>11</sup> See Neil Hertz, 'A Reading of Longinus', in *The End of The Line* (New York, 1985), pp. 1–20. Two more recent essays develop readings in parallel with my own: Suzanne Guerlac, 'Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime', and Frances Ferguson, 'A Commentary on Suzanne Guerlac's "Longinus and the Subject of the Sublime"', both in *New Literary History*, XVI, no. 2 (Winter 1985).

example coupled with a sustaining commentary became a standard format for many treatises on a range of topics; from Blair's strenuously rhetorical treatment of the literary text in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* to the more complex interweaving of literary and non-literary forms found in William Melmoth's *The Letters of Sir Thomas Fitzosborne*.

Thus, from the perspective of rhetoric the clear connections Longinus's text has to handbooks of rhetorical figures meant that it could be very easily accommodated within the growing body of works on oratory and prescriptive rhetoric. Yet, the treatise is clearly not constituted textually in the same way as Holmes's *Art of Rhetoric* (1739) or Stirling's *System of Rhetoric* (1733); while it shares many of the concerns of these two handbooks, and even covers identical ground, Longinus's treatise is marked by a singular awareness of the complexities of rhetorical ordering. Indeed, where Holmes and Stirling imagine themselves to be building upon and keeping alive the classical rhetorical tradition Longinus could be said to be undermining it from within.

Something of this complexity, which we might call its ironic distance following Paul de Man, can be glimpsed in the following citation:

... sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown. The effect of elevated language upon an audience is not persuasion but transport.<sup>12</sup>

The wavering or hesitation implied by the use of 'certain' is noteworthy, proleptic even of the slippages that are to occur throughout the remainder of the text, for it is precisely the extent of that 'certain' which is under examination, and which, unsurprisingly, has no finite quantity. But, there is a more important feature to the opening of this text, one which will occupy almost all the writers on the sublime discussed in this book, and that is the quiet assertion which closes the citation: elevated language produces transport not persuasion.

For, while the 'transport' habitually associated with sublime sensation had, by the time of the early eighteenth century, become a figure for sublimity, a trope of the figurative power of the sublime, it is precisely this doubled figuration which disturbs and troubles the theorists we will go on to discuss. In Longinus the stress upon transport against persuasion signals a departure from the Ciceronian scheme, but its relocation of the relations between the persuasion effected by transport and the transport resulting from persuasion are relatively unimportant. However, in the eighteenth-century context this slightly different emphasis leads to much greater problems, for the genuflection to prior authority runs into severe difficulties. Rhetorical theory legislated, with ease in

<sup>12</sup> Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, 2nd ed (Cambridge, 1907), p. 43.

fact, the limits and limitations of persuasion; it did not set out the limit cases for 'transport' understood in its doubled figurative sense. This is to note that the rhetorical force of 'transport' is not confined to the arts of oratory and persuasion: 'transport' as a trope not only stands for the heightened sensation of the sublime, it also *produces* sublimity. It could be argued that eighteenth-century aesthetics takes on precisely the task of limiting the power of this trope, and that its major achievement is to construct an adequate legislature able to police the transport of the sublime experience. However, if that achievement can be said to be the end result of theories on the sublime we need to examine both the reasons for its perceived necessity and its effects within the larger domain of discourses implicated within the transport of elevated experience.

In the first place theories on the sublime, in their departure from classical rhetorical descriptions of sublimity, are immediately faced with the problem of locating an authority or authenticating discourse. Such a discourse would be needed to control the transport resulting from the sublime experience, and to determine the limits of the transportation, from where and to where, with whom and by whom. This is far from playing with words, as the following citation from Longinus should make clear:

Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude. [43]

This is a disturbing description of the sublime 'rush', the 'transport' of the sublime experience, since what is at stake is precisely the loss of power of human agency. The sublime comes to reign over the hearer, which is a conventional description of the power of eloquence, but the suggestion is also present that 'sublimity flashing forth' may not only overpower the audience but also the orator – it scatters everything before it. Traditional rhetoric places the power of this scene squarely in the domain of the orator's skill, his ability to move or sway his audience according to whim, but this potentially excessive account of the sublime moment wavers at the point where it gives up all pretensions to authority and control: it very nearly succumbs to the influences of the sublime, its power and irresistible might. This is why the scene and its description is sublime.

Of course the passage closes by re-asserting the power of the orator, which emerges after the thunderbolt – 'and at once', the addition is required, the qualification a surplus of the moment itself. This power of the orator is more like the residue of the sublime, the still voice after the storm, the leakage into a vacant space. The orator, in fact, could be described as having been possessed by

the 'sublime', as the medium through which it flows so that his power is really no longer his own: it has, in one way of redescending the scene, as we shall see in a later example, been taken up into the thunderbolt.<sup>13</sup>

We can read this passage from a slightly different perspective by paying particularly close attention to the distances opened up in the contrast between 'our persuasions' and the 'orator', a hiatus which is characteristic of a large number of works on the sublime, and which sets up the possibility for a discourse of the sublime that is both self-originating and self-authenticating. It is the insistence on two protagonists at work in the scene of transport, and the identification with or within each individual, within both the hearer and the orator, which tends towards the production of a theory of the self, along with a self-legitimizing theory. In the example above one of those protagonists can be labelled the subject, the agency which sees itself as controlling persuasion – our persuasions we can usually control – and the other an external force, either the sublime or the thunderbolt depending on whether one is referring to the audience or the orator, which fractures, scatters, splits the first, the subject, even as it describes that power as inhering within it. The orator here is the transitional figure, both controlling the persuasions of his audience and losing self-control: both the empowered agent and overmastered subject. This complex scene of spacing, opening up one set of determining criteria of the subject while defeating another, is a deeply problematic feature of eighteenth-century oratorical theory. In our contemporary terms we might want to see this in relation to a Freudian topology, in terms of the unconscious or the splitting of the subject.<sup>14</sup>

We can now see why the word 'transport' is a key word for studies on the sublime, and should note the strenuous counter-claim being made in the first citation above from Longinus, that elevated language does not, and does not set out to, persuade. What then is the transport that arises in the hearers, what is being transported, by whom and from where to where? These questions

<sup>13</sup> These glosses on this passage will seem, at this stage, excessive, but when they are placed in the context of Sheridan's remarks about the power of the orator in chapter 7 they will come to seem muted.

<sup>14</sup> This is to get ahead of the discussion somewhat, but it nevertheless points out the general trajectory to be followed. Recent work on the sublime has pursued precisely this extension: see notably the special issue of *New Literary History*, XVI, no. 2 (Winter 1985), 'The Sublime and Beautiful, Reconsiderations. It should also be pointed out that a further contextualization is required here, in which Longinus's text, in its eighteenth-century translation, is placed with regard to the larger aims and issues articulating the 'augustan moment', a discursive network which defines the social, cultural and political roles of the individual. The use of *On the Sublime*, then, as the founding gesture of eighteenth-century works on the sublime has direct connections with a certain politics of authentication, a certain politics of legitimation, and a certain politics of subjectivity. These wider dimensions will be treated in some detail in ch. 4.

increasingly preoccupy eighteenth-century aestheticians both in their reading and use of the Longinian text, as well as in their own attempts to describe the technologies surrounding, distributing and articulating sublime experience. In respect to this it becomes clear that in the turn away from the pre-existing framework of rhetorical theory the discourse on the sublime had either to produce its own framework for analysis and verification, or use another set of criteria, already articulated and authenticated in another discursive milieu. This, then, is the main problem that arises: the production of a set of criteria for describing, analysing and legitimating the 'transport' of the sublime experience, which not only has claims to authenticity or efficacy, but also particular application to and within the discourse on the sublime.

It seems to me that the so-called 'turn to the subject' can be explained in these terms, since a unified and unitary subject allows the production of a number of authenticating theories, about the social constitution of the individual, the internal psychological economy of subjectivity, and ethical protocols of self which all help to explain and allow analysis of the transport associated with the sublime experience.<sup>15</sup> This is also, in part, why rhetorical theory was, at least initially, so attractive for the discourse on the sublime.

If we were to sketch a consecutive logic for this phase of eighteenth-century aesthetics we could say that the discourse on the sublime initially turns to the nascent theory of the subject which had been produced by rhetorical theory; indeed the link between rhetoric and aesthetics articulates that pressure to subjectivity. Let us look once again at the passage from Longinus:

Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer. Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude.[43]

The pressure to a discourse of the subject can be located in this curious battle between 'our persuasions' and the power of the orator: if the subject is owned, is a unified cohesive force, not produced by and residing within a particular instance of discourse or speech, then 'our' persuasions can indeed be seen as the property of the individual and not of the discursive event, the encounter with

<sup>15</sup> In this limited way the teleological narrative referred to above interconnects with the present argument. However, let us not forget to mention that during the same period the boundaries determining the construction and function of the individual were under severe pressure to be increased and at the same time be placed under the letter of the law. In this respect social, political, legal, theological, commercial, sexual and medical definitions and concepts of subjectivity are of singular importance for a more powerful description of the 'rise of the subject'.

the discourse spoken by the orator. If it is not a property of the individual then it can only be the product of an excessive discursivity in which we, as individuals, come into an awareness of self-hood at the moment when the power of the sublime is manifest. The task addressed by Longinus and his eighteenth-century heirs is to create a discourse *on* that sublimity which contains that power. If this fails the possibility arises that the discourse on the sublime might break out of its boundaries and produce sublimity. The move that Longinus makes in relation to this awesome possibility is instructive since it is echoed time and time again by eighteenth-century theorists on the sublime: essentially he defuses the power of the discourse by appropriating it to the power of the orator. Rhetorical theory has a set of rules for governing this power, and hence the possible unlawful and untruly discourse is brought to law.

The description of the sublime 'rush' in mythological and mystical terms, the metaphorical imputation of the divine is also instructive, since it indicates the other discursive field that the discourse on the sublime habitually turns to for authentication: theology. This is, of course, a rather obvious move, since the experience of sublimity is directly linked to those objects in the world that are awesome, the direct expression of God's awesome power. However, that move becomes increasingly problematic as the power of speech, the orator's ability not to persuade his hearers but to 'transport' them, is described as producing from within itself the transport which had formerly been associated with objects created by divine fiat. Furthermore, as we have already seen, this power may equally appropriate the orator as much as his audience.

If we return to the link that Longinus makes between the 'rush' of the sublime experience and the power of the voice we can note another set of family resemblances in the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime. Not only must the sublime experience emanate from somewhere, from a place, it must also be contained within a place, and that topos is, in a large number of cases, the voice. On account of this the discourse on the sublime both accommodates and produces another discursive field which we could term the discourse of social control, the politics of speech. This discursive field is allied to rhetorical theory, and stretches across that domain into a new area usually referred to as elocution: the politics and policing of correct speech.

Once again, the citation from Longinus points towards this in his insistence that we can 'control our persuasions': that we are able to determine how, why and where our speech has certain effects on a specific community of hearers and on ourselves. This analysis in which the power of the voice comes to be seen as the location and generative principle of transport, however, opens up another set of problems which are also carefully scrutinized in early eighteenth-century treatments of the sublime. These are concerned with the adequacy of language to describe, delimit and control the world: the age-old concern of the relation between words and things, the adequacy and efficacy of representation.

Turning to an eighteenth-century writer, John Bailie, this problem over the

powers of language is addressed in the course of the investigation into the relation between qualities inhering in external objects and the effects they have within the mind. This might be termed the *locus classicus* for early eighteenth-century aesthetic curiosity. If a homology of the type referred to above does not pertain then the discourse on the sublime threatens to become, in an unproblematic sense, the discourse of the sublime: the power of language alone produces sublimity. Bailie writes:

In searching into the *Sublime* of the *Passions*, it is not my Intent to re-examine the *Disposition* we feel upon viewing the Grand and Magnificent: but to inquire into those *Affections*, which when they appear in *another*, are ever deemed *great*, and affect the *Person* who contemplates them with an *elevated* Turn of *Mind*. For the *Sublime* of the *Passions* must influence the *Mind* in the same manner as the *Sublime* of *natural objects*, and must produce the same *Exaltedness* of *Disposition*. — Were not their *Effect* upon the *Mind*, the same *Exaltedness* of *Disposition*, — they wou'd with *Impropriety*, bear the same *Name*, and could by no Means be the *Subject* of this *Inquiry*.<sup>16</sup>

It is evident that the limiter here is the natural world, for which we should read God's creation. However, the problem over the translation of these external qualities into internal effects still pertains, and is one that is continually troublesome for eighteenth-century aestheticians. It is this which is commonly addressed through reference to what is often taken to be a nascent theory of psychology.

Bailie attempts to sidetrack this problem through recourse to the connection between descriptions of objects in the world and the objects themselves: such descriptions are 'produced', of course, in language. If these descriptions are taken to be equivalent to the natural objects in their abilities to raise sublime sensations, it follows that writing, or more generally language is transparent, a neutral medium of representation:

Hence it seems, that *Rules* for the *Sublime* should most naturally result from an Inquiry what the *Sublime* is: and if this is an Inquiry which *Longinus* has entirely passed over, there is still Room for further Speculation. But as the *Sublime* in *Writing* is no more than a Description of the *Sublime* in *Nature*, and as it were painting to the *Imagination* what *Nature* herself offers to the *Senses*, I shall begin with an inquiry into the *Sublime* of *Natural Objects*, which I shall afterwards apply to *Writing*. [3]

Here we find a balanced economy within which the natural world, language, imagination, the senses and passions are all interdependent, intertransferable and, given their textualization in writing, intertextual. This leads to the necessity that one be able to read the natural world in an analogous way to the text which describes it, thereby enabling the language used by the discourse of

<sup>16</sup> John Bailie, *An Essay on the Sublime* (London, 1747), pp. 15–16.



analysis, the discourse on the sublime, to exhibit a direct one-to-one referentiality to real objects. If this legibility becomes disrupted or defaced then the limits that constrain the discourse on the sublime, its very restricted referentiality, may become ineffectual and the discursive analytic may correspondingly become excessively productive: writing may, all on its own, with reference to no singular natural object, cause sublime sensation. Baillie cannot allow that to happen, and accordingly insists on the direct translation of the outer world into writing.

If we glance back to the first citation from Baillie's treatise on the sublime we can see even more clearly this direct one-to-one translation: the sublime of the passions *must* produce the same 'exaltedness of disposition' as the sublime of natural objects. One aspect of this translatability should be examined before passing on: the clinching part of Baillie's argument concerns the *naming* of the 'subject of this inquiry'. The naming of the subject is indeed the problem for Baillie's treatise: it is forced, through its own analytic procedures, to come to a self-realization that the subject for enquiry is effectively unnameable.<sup>17</sup>

This problem of taxonomy and identification is immediately apparent, even from a cursory glance at the treatises taken to be constitutive of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Indeed, the urge to classify almost seems obsessive. I take it that this drive towards a complete and coherent classification cannot be explained solely in terms of the general project within the period to construct a complete empirical systematicity: the project to clarify and classify the world. While this drive is clearly one of the features of a specifically neoclassical or augustan ordering of knowledge, as an explanation of the naming principle it does not fully take into account the necessity of this drive given that the discourse on the sublime transforms from an ethico-aesthetic enquiry into a psychology of the individual. Furthermore, it erases what we are beginning to chart here, the trajectory of the discourse on the sublime towards the discourse of the sublime.<sup>18</sup>

In order to explain this we need to question the very resistance to the naming of the subject, hinted at in Baillie's treatise, and made increasingly explicit in the

<sup>17</sup> I am tempted to make a strong reading here, and suggest that the unnameable which surfaces is subjectivity. This is to get ahead once again, but we can see, I think, some of the problems arising in Baillie's insistence on the naming principle. We might say that in this instance the discourse on the sublime opens up that area in which the subject will become a discursive counter, in which it will be named. Baillie does not confront this problem directly, since he wishes to make an exact correspondence between inner effect and outer quality. That correspondence will break down continually in the theories of aesthetics which concern us in the following.

<sup>18</sup> Examinations of the augustan or neoclassical from different perspectives all bearing on the present argument can be found in J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985); Howard Erskine Hill, *The Social Milieu of Alexander Pope* (London, 1975); and Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London, 1970).

works which follow. For, it is not only the nature, dimensions and effects of the origin of sublime sensation which elude fixation, classification, order, but also the end of that sensation, the production of heightened awareness, consciousness of self, subjectivity. It is the human subject, then, which both resists naming, and is the object of the obsessive drive to classify. In Baillie's work the function of the name takes the place of the subject, it is the very fact of naming which gives coherence, cohesion and order to both the world and the discourse on it.<sup>19</sup>

It should be clear by now that I see this emergent problematic of the subject, its name and position within the discursive hierarchy as both the result and object of the discourse on the sublime. I find it convenient to describe this emergence in terms of a leakage or fissure within the discourse of description and analysis: it is almost as if the discourse of the sublime, one in which the subject is named as the subject, as in power, erupts within the discourse on the sublime. The following chapter discusses in some detail this emergence in these terms. In order to complete this sketch of the project of eighteenth-century aesthetics we may place next to Baillie's treatise a much later example, belonging to a different ordering of possibilities for and problematics of the subject, but nevertheless connected to these earlier discussions.

It may seem illegitimate to take Coleridge's speculations on the sublime as a comparative control for this examination of eighteenth-century aesthetics for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious one, that his writing belongs more properly to the 'romantic' can in fact be turned to productive use. If we are able to note large differences in the romantic text it will bring into focus more sharply the boundaries of the earlier project.

Another objection that the question of the subject calls forth a different set of positionalities and problematics for the romantic writer can also be usefully turned in our favour, for it is precisely those differences in conceptualization of the subject which allow us to locate the 'rise of the subject' within the period under discussion. In addition to these objections it might be perceived as rather too easy to take such a large historical sweep, which will, likely as not, produce distortions in our account of the eighteenth-century materials.

Notwithstanding, I do not mean to construct a chronology of the subject, as it were, and to argue that the romantic conception of subjectivity is the result of, or caused by its eighteenth-century precursor texts, be they on the sublime or more generally on or around the concept of personal identity or subjectivity. That argument need not be addressed here – it is examined at length in chapter 11 – since the topic for the present discussion is the function of the discourse on the sublime in relation to its neighbouring discourses, and its placement within the discursive network which contextualizes and enables its descriptions and

<sup>19</sup> This brings into consideration, of course, the proximity of Baillie's argument to certain kinds of theological speculation.

analyses. As I have already argued the subject is both constituted by and taken as the object of that discourse; it is instructive therefore, to compare it with another discourse which exhibits a number of similarities in terms of its problematics, but which comes to a different set of conclusions and orderings.

#### THE OBJECT OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AESTHETICS.

Coleridge's comments about the sublime are scattered throughout his prose writings; he did not, unlike Wordsworth, write a sustained piece on the topic. I shall not attempt to give an adequate description of either writer's thoughts on the subject as this can be found elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> For our purposes a few instances of Coleridge's speculations will suffice in order to sketch the differences mentioned above. The first immediately strikes us on account of its forceful awareness of self:

But Gothic art is Sublime. On Entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite: earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible expression left is, 'that I am nothing!'<sup>21</sup>

For Coleridge, who is writing in a mode that has been called the 'romantic sublime' by Thomas Weiskel, the expansion of the mind associated with the contemplation of a sublime object represents a loss of subjectivity, an all-subsumption of the perceiving mind into the eternal and infinite. In this way the distinctions between subject and object, or between inner and outer are blurred as the very participation of the subject within the experiential leads to an identification of the subject with the object. This is clearly a special case, prompted by the peculiarities of the architecture, and complicated by the associations surrounding the fabric of a church. However, this identification or subsumption, it matters not which way the argument is run, depends upon a prior set of assumptions which we will need to examine.

The first and most obvious assumption at work in this description is the persistence and coherence of the subject, that an 'I' enters into the experiential domain rather than being produced by it. A second assumption is that an 'expression' may have a direct relationship to the experience, that it may capture within discourse the matter and material of the senses. Coleridge's (intended) pun, that the 'only sensible expression left is "that I am nothing"', underlines this correlation. This takes us to the larger, and for our purposes more important, assumption about the discourse of analysis and description, for the

<sup>20</sup> See Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, and A.O. Wlecke, *Wordsworth and the Sublime* (Berkeley, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Coleridge's *Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T.M. Raysor (London, 1936), p. 12.

Coleridgean text is activated within a context in which the discourse on the sublime continually mutates into, or even generates, a discourse of the sublime. This will be taken up in the following chapter; here we need only remark that both subject and object are posited as discrete forms which coalesce in the description of the sublime experience, and result in the annihilation of subjectivity.

I am attempting to point out here that it is not the categorization of experience, nor the taxonomy of response which allows Coleridge to claim first an expansion of consciousness which is then followed by its annihilation, but the function of the discourses of description and analysis: the sublime experience is first and always an event produced by the discursive analytic. This is not a very great change from various eighteenth-century conceptualizations of the sublime, but its central difference lies in the ease with which the discourse of the sublime is accommodated within and assigned to a technology of subjectivity. These comments will become far clearer as we progress, but they can be immediately strengthened by comparing Coleridge's comments on Gothic cathedrals with those of Addison.

This comparison will allow us to identify the difference between the discourse on the sublime and its wariness in the face of its own excess, and the discourse of the sublime with its corresponding ease and pursuit of it. Here is Addison, writing in *The Spectator*:

We are obliged to devotion for the noblest buildings, that have adorned the several countries of the world. It is this which has set men at work on temples and public places of worship, not only that they might, by the magnificence of the building, invite the deity to reside within it, but that such stupendous works might, at the same time, open the mind to vast conceptions, and fit it to converse with the divinity of the place. For everything that is majestic, imprints an awfulness and reverence on the mind of the beholder, and strikes in with the natural greatness of the soul.<sup>22</sup>

For Addison the mind may be opened 'to vast conceptions', it may be imprinted by external objects. This is a feature of the discourse on the sublime which presumes an unproblematic one-to-one translatability between qualities of objects in the world and internal sensations. The above description is aware of this transference, just as it echoes the original stamping in the breast of man by his creator. In some respects we are noticing the proximity between aesthetics and theology, already remarked upon above, which seems to produce a reluctance to move beyond the limited distance required for a conversation with the deity.

Consequently Addison's analysis of the sublime returns constantly to a commentary upon those objects that are external to the mind, no matter what might be presumed to be their internal effects, since it can call upon that

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Addison, *Critical Essays from The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond (Oxford, 1970), p. 188.

network of discourses which articulate man's being in relation to the world made by God – ethics and theology – in order to authenticate, enable and legislate its descriptions. We would not expect to find the eruption of an autonomous subject here, since the notion of the self is quite carefully and masterfully controlled by theology and ethics. This is not, of course, to say that Coleridge is oblivious of these contextualizing and legislating discourses, but it is to illuminate a set of differences.

Coleridge, in contrast to Addison, is delighted, if not obsessed with the subject's seduction into discursivity. It is precisely the opportunities for subjection, for the construction of a different subject presented by an internally legislating discourse, that of the sublime, which fascinate Coleridge. For him there can be no external objects that imprint themselves on the mind without the prior participation of the perceiving mind:

I meet, I find the Beautiful – but I give, contribute, or rather attribute the Sublime. No object of Sense is sublime in itself; but only as far as I make it a symbol of some Idea. The circle is a beautiful figure in itself; it becomes sublime, when I contemplate eternity under that figure. The Beautiful is the perfection, the Sublime the suspension, of the comparing Power. Nothing not shapely '*formosus: nam etiam musice suam habet formam*' can be called beautiful: nothing that has a shape can be sublime except by metaphor *ab occasione ad rem*.<sup>23</sup>

Coleridge, as is frequently the case, is here a more inexact writer than we might wish for; however that lack of precision enables a reading of the text's interstices, as much as it may be taken as an index to the difficulties presented by the text to its writing. In order to expand upon these comments, then, we need to untangle some of the interwoven strands of these two evasive and imprecise Coleridgean attempts at definition.

In the first instance the sublime experience for Coleridge is marked by a break or a change in consciousness – 'I am filled with devotion and awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me'. This move is discontinuous, it results from a rupture within the continuum of consciousness – a move from one state of mind to another. That change is analogously related to a change from a literal language of experience to a figural one; from the direct experience of the world to the mediated. As this rupture is made apparent, and as this change takes place there is in effect an eradication of self-consciousness, a blinking of consciousness in which the ways and means of knowing, the awareness that one knows, how one knows, and what one knows are suspended: I am nothing.

It is the failure of the perceiving mind that sets the chain reaction in motion in this first example of the expansion that takes place in consciousness on viewing a Gothic church. On looking at the expanse delimited by the outer structure of the building and realizing that the limits cannot be seen from inside – the height

and light conspire against the visual capacity of the viewer – the mind is forced to construct the boundaries of the internal space. In other words, the mind cannot accept the disjunction between the external visual information, given before entering the building, and the lack or failure of the sight to corroborate that information from the inside. In this disjunctive mode the mind expands outwards to fill the virtual limitless space – that unbounded space suggested by the failure of sight – and in so doing becomes effectively shapeless.

At this point the secondary pulse of the sublime intervenes. The mind knows that infinite shapelessness is redundant as a concept, and knows that there are in fact limits to the building – that it is a bounded space – thereby restricting the infinite play of the expanded mind and extruding it into infinite shapelessness: it cannot determine the exact contours of the interior, but plays variations on the infinite possibilities. In this way the mind more closely mirrors the object it perceives. But, as we have already seen, Coleridge refuses a direct one-to-one translation theory of the sublime: he wishes to move the discourse on the sublime into a purely figurative scheme.

Therefore, the expansion of the mind to fill the void left by sight must be seen as an extension of the boundaries of the mind, so that the mind itself recedes from shape as it becomes infinite shape. Thus, the shapelessness of the church, which is the primary experience, has been troped into the shapelessness of the mind in a secondary figurative move, and the mind becomes an enclosed infinite shape, i.e. without shape. This shapeless form inhabits the infinite shapelessness of the interior of the church: the external has become the boundary delimiting the possibilities for the internal. In terms of the relations between the discourse of analysis and the experience described, what we are witnessing is the eversion of the discourse on the sublime so that its boundaries become internalized within the limits of the experiential, while its interior becomes the substance of the experience.

This strategic use of the building as an analogous trope for the sublime is very common because we know from experience that interior spaces are very often at odds with our expectations derived from the exterior form: on entering large bounded spaces we are nearly always struck by *discrepancy*, of one sort or another. The interior is either larger or smaller than expected, lighter or darker, its intricate exterior surface is either reproduced in some detail internally, or the opposite pertains in which a busy exterior is balanced by a static interior, and so on. However, if we read this facet of our common experience as a way of understanding not just large buildings but of the relationships between inner and outer, the trope which animates this scheme becomes apparent: the disjunction between exterior and interior leads to an eversion, in which internal markers are turned outside, becoming the boundary or limits of the discourse.

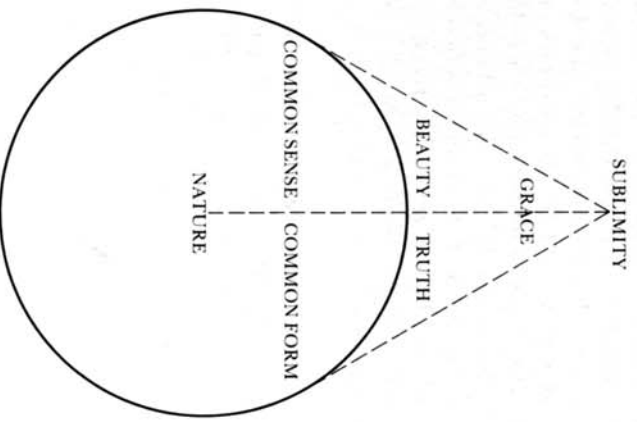
The differences between Addison's and Coleridge's use of the church as an analogue for the experience of the sublime do not solely lie in their differing conceptions of that experience or the subject who experiences. As I hope to have

<sup>23</sup> Coleridge, 'Unpublished Fragments on Aesthetics', ed. T. M. Raysor, *Studies in Philology*, XXII (1925), pp. 532–3.

demonstrated, these distances are worked out within the markedly distinct fictions performed by each discursive analytic. It is not so much that the sublime or the subject has changed between these arbitrary points in time but that the discourse on aesthetics has; it has changed in the ways it understands its own power to the sublime.

It is the figurative manoeuvre, referred to above as eversion, that characterizes a very large number of works on aesthetics during the latter half of the eighteenth century. I do not wish to claim that it is the 'master trope' of the discourse of the sublime,<sup>24</sup> but something like eversion is present to Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) or Kames's *Elements of criticism* (1763), to Reid's *Lectures on the Fine Arts* (1774) and William Thomson's *An enquiry into the elementary principles of beauty* (1798) so that the following discussion of Frances Reynolds's diagram of the sublime is extremely pertinent.

Reynolds's *An enquiry concerning the principles of taste, and of the origin of our ideas of beauty*, published in 1785, is most often read as a minor work on the moral sublime. It is certainly true that Reynolds takes some pains to link taste to ethics, concluding with the 'definition of taste being . . . the love of virtue'.<sup>25</sup>

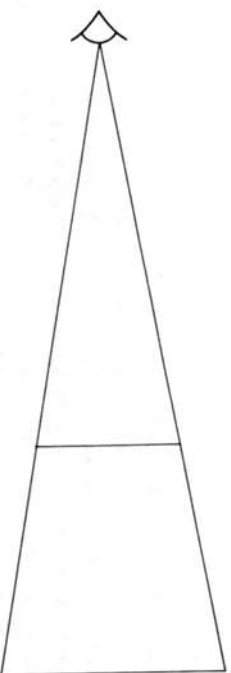


<sup>24</sup> I mean to refer to the work of Hayden White here, most especially his investigation of a four-fold rhetorical scheme in which dominant 'master tropes' are said to determine a particular period and its history writing. See *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973) and *Tropics of Discourse*, (Baltimore, 1978).

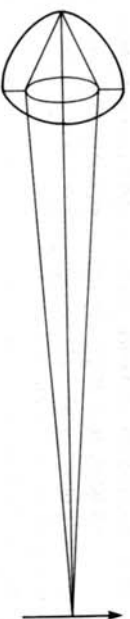
<sup>25</sup> Frances Reynolds, *Enquiry concerning the principles of taste, and of the origin of our ideas of beauty* (London, 1785), p. 49.

However, this ethical drive is subordinated to the major part of the *Enquiry* which deals with the topology of the sublime.

At the very opening of her brief dissertation Reynolds presents a diagram of 'the respective distances' between 'the common, the beautiful, the graceful, and the sublime' reproduced opposite. I want to read this diagram in the light of eighteenth-century theories of vision and perspective, and refer the reader to the fuller discussion of this topic in chapter 8. The briefest way of introducing the following reading is to present two diagrams of vision. The first is the familiar 'Albertian window' used for perspective projections:



and the second is a model of vision depicting the focal length of the faculty of sight:



Both of these models are present to eighteenth-century conceptions of vision, and can be seen at work in Frances Reynolds's diagram of the sublime.<sup>26</sup> If we superimpose these two diagrams on to Reynolds's schematic representation of the sublime we can note two distinct possibilities for readings. The first diagram above places the eye where Reynolds situates sublimity. This schema is sanctioned by the increasing tendency during the course of the century to internalize the sublime already noted above. In the superimposition of this model beauty and truth seem to occupy the place of the canvas, behind which stand the 'realities' of common sense and common form, and finally nature. As a model of the distances between the perceiving eye and the 'real' it designates the filters through which perception operates.

<sup>26</sup> The 'Albertian window' can be found reproduced in almost every treatise on perspective discussed in chapter 8. The model of the focal length of sight can be found in James Ayscough, *A short account of the eye and nature of vision* (London, 1754).

If we now read Reynolds's schematic representation according to our second diagram of vision, the eye is figured in the same place as nature, which I am taking here as including human nature. The eye in this scheme projects out into the world onto the canvas, as it were, its object of perception/production: the sublime. In this description of Reynolds's diagram beauty, truth, and grace are objects which do not require such great distances of projection: they are closer to the circle of human nature than the sublime.

The difference between these two superimposed readings of Reynolds's schema comes down to an eighteenth-century commonplace, the nature of perception in terms of either reception or projection. It is clear that both these possible readings are being articulated at the same time by Reynolds, and in order to examine their interaction we will need to follow her argument closely. As has already been noted Reynolds is writing within the framework of a moral treatise, one which takes human nature as its central focus of analysis; however, as the following discussion sets out to demonstrate, the ethical rules of conduct, the limiters of the discourse on ethics, are less the object of analysis than the limits or boundary required in order to enable an eversion of centre to boundary, and subsequent inversion of boundary to centre to take place. They are, as it were, the pre-text upon which the treatise is based and which allows and produces various figurations or disfigurations within the general field of enquiry, the discourse on the sublime.

Reynolds begins the description of her topology in this way:

In the exact center of my circle of humanity, I have placed nature, or the springs of the intellectual powers, which tend, in a straight line, to its boundary; and, on its boundary, I have placed demonstrable beauty and truth, and the utmost power of rules; and, midway, I have placed common sense and common form, half deriving their existence from pure nature, and half from its highest cultivation, as far as art or rules can teach.[5]

It might be remarked immediately that Reynolds is striving for an equivalent mathematical precision in her prose to that exemplified by the diagram. However, the first thing that strikes us in reading this explanation is that its explanatory power is misplaced or misdirected, for although she manages to put into prose a rendition of the various spatial relations that are diagrammatized, she omits to explain what most urgently needs explanation: the non-figurative meanings of these words and geometric relations.

This misapplication of her explanatory prose is also reflected in her lack of precision: where the diagram makes definite and fixed connections the prose makes ambiguous and slippery statements. Thus, the proximity of 'nature' to 'its boundary' invites us to take the sense as referring to the boundary of nature, rather than the primary grammatical sense which refers to the boundary of the circle. We are pushed into this reading on account of the fact that the circle has no external referent, it is merely a heuristic device. This highlights the problem presented to us: how might we 'defigure' the figure – the diagram? Unfortunately we receive little aid in the text since Reynolds gives us in her prose

description statements which are simply re-descriptions of the figures, translations from geometric diagrammatization to linguistic figuration. Thus, what we want to be explained is left unexplained: we are not told what a 'center of humanity' is, still less are we given any indication of what the boundary of that circle might be in anything but geometric terms.

Furthermore, our initial efforts at clarifying this short-circuit of diagram into figuration run up against considerable problems: take, for example, the notion that the powers of the mind tend in a straight line to their boundary, a reading that becomes permissible by taking 'nature', qualified by Reynolds as the 'springs of the intellectual powers', as the antecedent of 'its'. We can understand this conceptually as a statement about the limitation of the powers of the mind; but, of course, once we read it this way we are immediately confronted by questions concerning the imposition of those boundaries: where do they come from, who imposes them, how are they kept as boundaries?

We might want to push this further, and see Reynolds herself as addressing these questions in her description of the boundary in terms of 'demonstrable beauty and truth' and the 'utmost power of rules'. It is quite clear that in terms of ethics 'demonstrable beauty and truth' are imposed by the fact of human nature, erected as boundaries by the working of human nature, and find their origin in human nature. These are, of course, the demonstrable categories and rehearsals of the arguments found in early eighteenth-century discussions of the ethical sublime. In the most general terms we can see that the fact of beauty and truth being 'demonstrable' refers to their being ratified in another domain: they are imported from an authentic and authenticating discourse in order to contain another discourse. In this instance beauty and truth are seemingly placed at the boundary of humanity, a comment that we may not find too difficult to understand in some unexamined sense. However, reading a little more closely, we might ask how Reynolds can place the 'utmost power of rules' on her boundary, when we have already seen that demonstrable beauty and truth are there already. This underscoring of the legislative move she wishes her 'boundary' to make is further complicated by the connection between rules or art and 'pure nature' in their production of common sense and common form.

The addition of the adjective 'pure' can be seen in the light of the need experienced by the discourse itself to circumscribe the area it legislates: nature is qualified as 'pure nature' because the discursive analytic has produced a splitting or doubling of the original 'nature'. On account of this it would appear that two versions of nature are present to the diagram, the first placed at the centre of the circle, that is the boundary inverted to the centre, and the second a product of the discourse, the pure nature that always remains outside, refusing diagrammatization. This 'pure nature' is, therefore, that which functions as the external object resistant to analysis, but which underwrites the discourse. It is the product of this discursive manoeuvre in which it is posited as external in order for the diagram to function at one level, and, at another, for the discursive analytic to operate.

From this we can see that Reynolds, in her refusal to make literal the figured diagram, is performing a reading that we might call disfigurative, or, perhaps more generally, theoretical. We could say that she everts her own discourse of explanation, refusing to move outside the topology of the sublime. This can be seen even more clearly in the following citation:

The intellectual powers, arriving at the limit of my common circle, i.e. at the limit of the basis of my pyramidal system, where I have placed the fixed proportions of beauty and of truth, (if they progress) mount up as a flame, with undulating motion, refining as they advance, and terminate in the pinnacle, or ultimate point, *sublimity*:[5]

This analysis is in some measure elliptical, refusing to name its object, but it is also peculiarly faithful to its chosen object, for what could the sublime be if it were easily reduced to or produced by mere lucid explanatory prose?

The above citation is clearly concerned with the limits of the discourse of analysis as much as with the limits of the perceiving mind. In this connection the sublime naturally resides in the place beyond human powers, hence Reynolds's placement of grace:

Grace is the characteristic object or general form of the ideal region, and its perception is the general limit of the powers of imagination or taste. Few, very few, attain to the point of sublimity: the *ne plus ultra* of human conception the alpha and omega. The sentiment of sublimity sinks into the source of nature, and that of the source of nature mounts to the sentiment of sublimity, each point seeming to each the cause and the effect: the origin and the end! [6]

The movement described here is that with which we began, the projection/reception model of vision, the distance of the eye in sight. It is precisely the limitation of the human visual faculty which crosses into the analogue of sublime experience, in which human nature sinks in the face of the '*ne plus ultra* of human conception'. In terms of the topologies here being proposed we can say that the ratios governing Reynolds's various distances suggest that the human mind might reach the sublime, but the dotted line ending at its apex just before sublimity negates the possibility of final attainment, in this way the experience and description of the sublime is an asymptote. This topology is inextricably caught within the topology of the discursive analytic: Reynolds is attempting to describe via circumscription: she is marking off that area, called the sublime, as outside the common forms of experience, and as she does this she realizes that she has also blocked the possibility of using the same analytic and descriptive framework as used in the 'limit', that of grace. She outlines this bluntly in the next paragraph:

The first point The exact center, *nature*, or the origin of our intellectual faculties, admits of no investigation, its idea, as I have observed before, loses itself in the sentiment of sublimity, and we see nothing; and therefore I pass on to an object which is perceptible, the common general character of humanity, exterior and interior. [7]

While nature 'admits of no investigation', human nature is more than susceptible to analysis.

Here Reynolds runs up against one of the perennial problems faced by eighteenth-century theorists of many kinds, the search for the sanctioning origin. Reynolds is suggesting that while human nature is not without its attendant problems of origination we suspend our enquiry before reaching the bottom line, as it were. In this way we can rise to the point of grace, and because of the spatial proximity of grace to sublimity, from there we may fall over into the sublime. As she writes: 'where pure grace ends, the awe of the sublime begins' [17]. Grace, we should remember from the diagram, is the everted limit case, the defining boundary produced by the fact of human nature, the limit of the focal distance of sight. However, once it takes its place as boundary it comes under the threat of the trope of eversion, and this is precisely what happens: it becomes everted so that we are unable to know what is at the centre, what grace is, finding only boundary, the limit case.

Once grace functions as a marker within the topology of the sublime its function destroys its essence, and we are left with no definition of grace, the furthest point we may reasonably expect to reach on the diagram. Reynolds explains this:

You can no more define grace than you can happiness. The mind cannot so steadfastly behold it as to investigate its real properties. Grace is indeed the point of happiness in the ideal region, both because it arises spontaneously, without effort, &c. and because it seems partly *within* our own power, and partly *without* it. [17]

Grace has become a discursive counter functioning both within the object discourse and the discursive analytic. It operates as a controlling and legitimating trope, at once internal to the discursive analytic and hidden from its gaze, everted from it.

It is because of this inherent capacity of the trope of eversion to produce the boundary or limit case that the discourse of analysis continually runs aground. The term that Reynolds uses most frequently when faced with the impenetrability of her object of study, or of the self-sealing nature of her own discursive analytic, is power. It is instructive, then, that in writing about the experience of power itself the Burkean paradox becomes apparent:

Those only who have passed through the degrees, *common sense, truth, and grace*, i.e. the sentiment of grace, can have a sentiment of sublimity. It is the mild admiration of grace raised to *wonder and astonishment*; to a sentiment of *power* out of *our power* to produce or control. [18]

Here the ambiguity in the phrase 'out of our power', meaning both derived from, and beyond the control of, articulates the doubled distances of Reynolds's analysis of the sublime: both projection and reception, within the mind and external to it. The sentiment of power is, fundamentally, inhuman, dehumanizing: it forces the recognition of limitation even as it opens up the possibility of infinite expansion.

We may briefly recall Coleridge's attempts to explain the same sensation which for him results in self-annihilation. For Reynolds the property of the subject is not yet so secure. It is for this reason that she cannot countenance the dissolution of self so willingly courted by Coleridge, and returns to a theory which is so fully determined by and contained within the trope of eversion. This allows her to place, situate, delimit the external unlegislatable, unthinkable. In her own framework it is the ethical subject, not the aesthetic which occupies that position:

As the universal idea or sentiment of taste is honour, so the universal object of its perception is ornament, from the object, whose excellence we contemplate as an ornament or honour to human nature, to every object which in the slightest degree indicates the influence of the excellence. Take away the idea of that influence in the moral sphere, and taste is annihilated: and, in the natural sphere, take away the idea of divine influence, and taste cannot exist. Every sentiment of taste, as I observed before, ultimately relates to the one or to the other of these principles: indeed, strictly speaking, as the moral relates to the divine, it may be said ultimately to do the same. [39]

The above discussion of Reynolds's *Enquiry* will undoubtedly seem rather strange or strained, and it might appear that I have given the impression that her arguments and analyses are very abstract and imprecise. I have been forced to comment in the way I have in part because of the resistances presented by her text: it really is 'about' the diagram she gives on the second page, and it really is about it in a very strange way. However, I have also been concerned to demonstrate the extent to which her theory is about the adequacy of theory, about the extent to which a discursive analytic can explain and describe its own products, for that is what the discourse on the sublime has become by the time that she is writing. It is quite clear, I think, that this treatise is not *on* the sublime, it is not *on* anything at all, perhaps, except itself. It is, however, a discourse which produces an excess, no matter what name we give to it, and it is this productive capacity that I have identified as the distinguishing feature of a discourse of the sublime.

At this point I will rehearse in a more schematic form the argument I am attempting to construct. Eighteenth-century theories of aesthetics are usually taken to be focused on, or about, or take as their object something called sublime experience or sensation. There can be no doubt that there is a discourse on this topic throughout the century, no matter how one might sketch the differences between the ethical sublime and the psychological. My own reading takes this as a given, and has attempted to demonstrate that a greater point is at issue in these theories, namely the production of something which cannot be contained by the analytical discourse.

One way of reducing the threat of this discursive product is to import another adjacent set of legislating theories, such as prescriptive rhetoric, in order to bring to law the unwanted product. I have briefly argued that the use of the

Longinian text was one of the first attempts to pursue this solution, and was soon joined by other external legislating discourses, such as theology and ethics (the precise ordering here is unimportant since I am not sketching a chronology). This would appear to be a constant feature of aesthetic judgement and enquiry. The current analysis, however, attempts to wrest eighteenth-century speculations on the sublime away from the restrictive boundaries imposed by aesthetics understood in its common sense.

If we take a larger overview, and compare early eighteenth-century discussions of the sublime with an early nineteenth-century one, Addison compared to Coleridge, it is clear that whatever else may have occurred in the wider network of discourses determining both writers' discussions, and whatever differences there are in the distinct projects undertaken by both theorists, the earlier has a problem with a self-authenticating subject whereas the latter has none, and even extends and develops this into a welcome invitation for self-annihilation. It would appear, then, that between these two very crude markers the discussion of the sublime accommodated itself, to say the very least, to a self-authenticating subject. The argument in the following chapter will make much stronger claims than these, but for the moment this weak formulation will suffice.

Taking Frances Reynolds as our convenient 'mid-point', we find that the discussion of the sublime, although on the surface controlled by considerations of the ethical dimension of aesthetic experience, has in fact become an unwieldy contemplation of its own powers as a discursive analytic, as a theory capable of explaining or describing heightened experience. The question, what is the sublime? in Reynolds's tract must be answered by a formulation which includes to a greater extent a description of the theory's own will to power. In this sense theories of the sublime can be seen as evolving into rather sterile self-advertisements. We may want to relegate Frances Reynolds's modest tract to the waste-bin of philosophical enquiry but the central problem she struggles with, concerning the status of the object of and for a discourse on the sublime, is fundamentally implicated within all of eighteenth-century aesthetics.

My own reading of the tradition referred to as eighteenth-century aesthetics departs, then, from a commonsense approach which assumes that all these theories – 6000 examples of which occur, let us not forget – are about something in the world, or in the mind, or a combination of both. For while many treatises are clearly and unambiguously about these things, the general transformation of the field of enquiry leads us to note that these enquiries become exceptionally self-referential: they are about themselves as theories. While one may retort that all theories can be described in this way, it is not my purpose to leave the argument here, nor to herald this as news. Rather my aim is to set up the discussion in such a way as to be able to perceive the working of this manifest discourse on the sublime, and its propensity to open up the space in which a latent discourse of the sublime is enabled, produced, empowered.

This argument can be focused by attending to the question of gender differentiation, a common problematic feature of the discourse on the sublime and which it very often has to negotiate its way around. I am thinking here of the evident links that pertain between sublime sensation and the 'rapture' or 'transport' of sexual union.<sup>27</sup> This is not only because the presumed 'bliss' arising from that union is the only physical analogue that approaches the extreme sensation of the sublime. It is also because the discourse on the sublime produces and examines subjectivity in gender-specific terms, thereby signalling its participation within the larger set of discourses determining sexuality for the period.<sup>28</sup> This argument begs many questions, not least the definition of 'sexuality' here being used: however we may shelve these concerns, at least temporarily, and approach the argument through an example.

My general point in the following is that the discourse on the sublime is faced with a product of its own analysis, which we will here label as the sexed subject,<sup>29</sup> with which it is both uncomfortable – an unwanted product – and hopelessly drawn to, fascinated by. The discourse on the sublime recognizes this sexed subject, but refuses to theorize it, refuses its distances, stops short of Reynolds's boundary in terror of being pushed across it.

If we return briefly to our first example of the rhetorical sublime taken from Longinus's treatise, we can note that the sublime caused by or aroused in rhetorical performance is part of an intersocial experience: it takes place within social space, however defined. It is precisely this aspect of the sublime, the problem either over translatability from one person to another, or of identical response, that causes the aesthetician of mid-century so much trouble, and which is refigured again and again during the history of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Longinus avoids this problem of confronting the 'other', or of social experiences of self, by restricting his description of the sublime transport to the power of the orator's performance, the sexual dimension of which is to be understood as the orator's experience of masculinity, of male power. When this

<sup>27</sup> This link is quite explicitly made in a number of texts on the practice of reading, discussed below in ch. 10.

<sup>28</sup> The use of gender-specific terms to refer to a very large number of activities and objects during the period has yet to be fully investigated. The 'feminization' of the social, cultural and political is one feature of this complex knot. Two accounts address these issues specifically and in extremely useful ways: Michael G. Cooke, *Acts of Inclusion* (New Haven, 1977), see 'The Feminine as the Crux of Value', pp. 122–83; and Jerome Christensen, *Practising Enlightenment* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1987), especially pp. 94–119.

<sup>29</sup> By which I mean to refer to the complex of relations articulated by the difference of gender: attitudes and figurations of the differences between male desire and female objectification, economies of sexuality split into masculine demand and feminine supply; social dissemination of gender roles; medical descriptions of gender-specific diseases and sexually transmitted ailments.

power is translated into the mid-century context, it brings with it a number of extremely disturbing effects.

These can be outlined in the following citation from Sheridan's *A rhetorical grammar* in anticipation of the argument pursued in chapter 6 and throughout the second part of this book. In Sheridan's analysis the power of the voice to seduce has become all-pervasive; so much so that it runs away with its user:

True eloquence does not wait for cool approbation. Like irresistible beauty, it transports, it ravishes, it commands the admiration of all, who are within its reach. If it allows time to criticize, it is not genuine. It ought to hurry us out of ourselves, to enlarge and swallow up our whole attention: to drive everything out of our minds, besides the subject it would hold forth, and the point it wants to carry. The hearer finds himself as unable to resist it, as to blow out a conflagration with the breath of his mouth, or to stop the stream of a river with his hand. His passions are no longer his own. The orator has taken possession of them; and with superior power, works them to whatever he pleases.<sup>30</sup>

The situation described here is that of the oratorical performance, and belongs more properly to the discussion of elocution: however, it does demonstrate the appropriation of subjects performed by the orator, and the sexual connotations allied to this subjecting performance. Sheridan is bewitched by the power of his own voice to such an extent that his discourse, here used in the simplest sense, threatens to run away with his self – the 'author' quite clearly begins to lose control. But this is as it should be since the sublime experience here described – the ravishment and transport which are its habitual tropes and conventional signs – is one in which the 'enlarging' of attention is commensurate with a certain male experience of sexual arousal, and the loss of self-control an habitual trope of a certain male description of sexual fulfilment.

Although this text can be situated quite easily within a tradition of male figurations of sexual experience – it draws upon those figures – something else present to it pushes the analysis into a more disturbing area in which the gender differentiation instantiated by the discourse on the sublime, the habitual binary division into feminine beauty and masculine sublimity, begins to produce abnormal effects. We can note this in Sheridan's repetition of the masculine pronoun, for the scene of seduction, which is so clearly a part of the oratorical performance, would more usually be described in heterosexual commonplace, of male attraction to female members of the audience.

Here, however, the audience is clearly male – 'the hearer finds himself – which not only brings up the question of a certain homoerotics articulated by the scene (the description of which should not be taken in our own contemporary senses of the homosexual) but also leads us to an analysis of the eruption of the male subject entirely in terms of the production of Sheridan's discursive

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *A rhetorical grammar of the English language* (Dublin, 1781), pp. 210–11.



analytic. This can be seen most easily in terms of the power experienced by all in the scene described – by both orator and audience. Power here is a male privilege, a masculine experience of the sublime, so that while the desire to seduce one's hearers is most commonly described in heterosexual terms, of the orator 'coming on' to an adoring and pliant female audience, here the ravishment and transport are so great, and so clearly a facet of the sublime experience, that the discursive analytic *demand*s that all described, whether orator or audience, experience a certain masculine sense of power and hence are subject to one of the defining characteristics of male gender difference. Put simply, the discourse produces the subject, and produces it in gender-differentiated terms because the discourse on the sublime operates the hard distinction between the masculine experience of power, authority and sublimity, and the feminine experience of subjection, obedience and beauty. (It hardly needs pointing out how powerful these figures have been in Western conceptualizations of subjectivity). It is for the same reasons that another habitual trope in descriptions of the sublime is the 'emasculation' of a sublime experience which takes place when, in Blair's terms, the 'tension of the mind' is 'relaxed'.<sup>31</sup>

What I mean to point out here is the way in which the discourse of analysis, which I take to be the discourse on the sublime here, even though, as already stated, the passage may belong more properly to a discussion of oratory, produces a subject, but produces it on and according to its own terms. Where we would expect a female subject as constituent of the audience, we find in fact a male subject, and this is to be understood as the product of the discourse, not its object.

In conclusion we can note that this chapter has attempted to sketch a certain problematic of the discourse on the sublime. It has endeavoured to read the topic of eighteenth-century aesthetics both in broad historical terms, and in ways which undermine that evolutionary scheme. Four features of the discursive analytic have been investigated: its importation of an external legislating authority, its tendency towards the breaking of its own boundary, its self-articulation as theory in the light of its sense of these matters, and its production of a gendered subject position. All these features are the result of an inquiry into the nature of eighteenth-century aesthetics when seen as a discourse, not as a set of works concerned with a putative common topic of investigation. In this way I hope to have introduced and contextualized the discussion in the following chapter, which will investigate in some detail the three works which form the basis of my understanding of the discourse of the sublime.

<sup>31</sup> Now, when an author has brought us, or is attempting to bring us, into this state [sublimity]: if he decks the Sublime object which he presents to us, round and round, with glittering ornaments: nay, if he throws in any one decoration that sinks in the least below the capital image, that moment he alters the key: he relaxes the tension of the mind: the strength of the feeling is emasculated: the Beautiful may remain but the Sublime is gone.' Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols (London, 1783), I, p. 66.

## 3

### The Discourse of the Sublime

The previous chapter outlined those problems arising in eighteenth-century aesthetics which derive from and lead to a questioning of the object taken for examination by a discourse on sublimity. These problems were brought to our attention through the operation of a very schematic chronological survey of the entire century, which was then investigated to some degree in order to ascertain the effectiveness of a chronological model for our analysis. We noted that all theories on the sublime to some extent face those problems which can be described as the product of an evolutionary narrative of eighteenth-century aesthetics. But the narrative in which the move from the ethical sublime to the psychological sublime is described has limited use when we begin to note that specific kinds of difficulties arise in what I have termed a discourse on the sublime. These difficulties bear upon the limits and limitations of the discourse of analysis. However, rather than jettisoning completely a chronological account I propose to test an even narrower temporal range in order to make a little more precise the distinctions between a discourse on the sublime and a discourse of the sublime.

Such a narrowing of focus has a further pay-off in that it enables us in the chapter following to place the discourse of the sublime, and its emergence in the discourse on the sublime, next to a neighbouring discourse which functions in much the same way. This chapter, then, will examine the generation of what I call the discourse of the sublime, and will take as its three exemplary texts Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Gerard's *An Essay on Taste*, and Kames's *Elements of Criticism*.

Something should be said about the choice of these three texts at the outset, since some misapprehensions of my project may be forestalled by explaining their selection. Most accounts of eighteenth-century aesthetics would certainly give ample space, if not pride of place, to one or two, if not all three of these texts. Consequently, in selecting them I am running the risk of strengthening the perception that they are the most important texts on aesthetics during the first sixty or so years of the century. This may or may not be true, but it should

be clear that I do not intend to serve such ends, most especially in the light of what I find to be an uncritical acceptance of which texts are to be taken as 'major' texts. This uncritical definition of the field ignores, for example, the enormous amount of periodical material contained in a host of journals and magazines from the *Idler*, through the *Connoisseur*, to the *World* dealing with the general topic of taste. These writings should certainly be given more attention than has so far been granted them, since these periodicals, along with a dozen or so more, contain significant contributions to the discourse on the sublime. Be that as it may, I have selected these texts for one reason only: they serve the ends of a limited historical explanation. This is to say that I am going to propose a reading of these texts which pays particular attention to the date of their publication, and the reason why I have restricted the time period between 1757 and 1763 is because it coincides with the Seven Years War.

I am not, however, going to argue that this period during which I trace the emergence of the discourse of the sublime is strictly defined by the pursuit of the war, or by the chronological boundaries I have just assigned it. This restriction of the period is a matter of heuristic convenience: by taking such a time span it becomes possible to locate and analyse the discourse of the sublime with greater precision. Furthermore, should a larger historical time period have been taken, the connections between this discourse and the discourse of debt which arises solely on account of the war, would have been weakened so as to make them less perceivable. I am not going to argue, for example, that the discourse of the sublime *only* comes to the surface during this period: it exists as both a possible and a realizable discourse for almost all the preceding years of the century, and indeed, if one were to understand this discourse in properly discursive terms it would be necessary to locate those previous discourses which transform and mutate during the seventeenth century thereby defining the limit and possibilities for a discourse of the sublime during the eighteenth century. Such earlier discourses might be legal or theological, literary or scientific: whatever the precise constituents of that discursive network, combined they all defined the knot of discourses that for a previous historical juncture articulated the body and the subject.

In relation to this point, I am not going to argue that the discourse of the sublime disappears after 1763; indeed cases could well have been made for taking earlier or later periods: clearly such choices would also be determined by their location within the general chronology of eighteenth-century aesthetics – the trajectory described in the previous chapter. If one looks at the end of the century, for example, it is clear that the period from Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, published in 1790, to Richard Payne Knight's *An analytical inquiry into the principles of taste*, published in 1805 also disturbs the surface of the topic, and pushes the relations between the analytic discourse of explanation and description and the objects of description, be they internal or external, in new directions. Whether or not this departs from a discourse on or

of the sublime is a question we must leave suspended since this chapter sets out to describe work on aesthetics during the period 1756–63 without reference to any texts outside these strict chronological limits.

It may appear from this that the three texts chosen as exemplary all participate within the general trajectory of eighteenth-century aesthetics to the same extent; that they all share the same concerns and aims. This is manifestly not true, as it would be equally wrong to claim that all three texts have precisely the same object in view. Furthermore, two of the texts, those by Burke and Gerard were not *written* within the confines of the designated time period, merely published within it.<sup>1</sup> This, however, does not significantly disturb my argument since the device of the restricted time period will be less concerned with the exact details of composition than with the 'knot' constituted by the various texts *published* during this period.

I will take the three texts in chronological sequence in order to facilitate a narrative of development, of evolution. This narrative will, in due course, itself be evicted to the boundary in order to test its limits and limitations. As will also become apparent, my reading of these texts is so 'close' or narrow that details of the larger arguments presented in them are blurred or erased. My attention throughout is on a certain operation of their discursive analytics, not on their substance or material argument, so this distortion in respect to their meanings – be they authorial, social, cultural or whatever – does not significantly interfere with the issues presented here. For this reason I have not provided synopses of the various arguments contained in these three works which would have slowed the pace of my own presentation unnecessarily. The central interest of the following is to be derived, therefore, from the operation of these exemplary texts as theory and not as theories about the world or the internal workings of the mind.<sup>2</sup>

#### A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS OF THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL

My main focus in dealing with Burke's *Enquiry* will be the section on power added to the second edition. This, as Boulton points out, following Wichehins,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burke's *Enquiry* took some ten years or so of writing, while Gerard submitted his *Essay* in 1756 for the prize offered by the Edinburgh Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, and Agriculture. See Boulton's introduction for an account of the former, and Hipple's chapter on Gerard for the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Readers curious as to the wider importance of these texts in relation to the object of theories on the sublime can find excellent synopses and introductions in Hipple's book. J. T. Boulton's introduction to his edition of Burke's *Enquiry* (London, 1958) remains the most detailed and useful introduction to that text.

<sup>3</sup> H. A. Wichehins, 'Burke's Essay on the Sublime and its Reviewers', *Journal of English and German Philology* (1922), XXI, 646–61.

was almost certainly seen by Burke himself as a reply to his hostile reviewers, and takes into account some of the realignments made by those reviews with the mainstream of eighteenth-century aesthetics – an alignment that Burke seemed unhappy with. Again, as Boulton makes very clear, Burke's ideas on the sublime departed to some extent from the mainstream, although his borrowings from Baillie and Longinus are evident. It should also be pointed out that although the *Enquiry* achieved a certain measure of notoriety, its influence on contemporary theories was more superficial than profound. Furthermore Boulton, for example, makes absolute the division between 'sensationalist' theories, those represented by Burke's *Enquiry*, and 'associationist', represented by both Gerard and Kames, so that possible 'real' connections between the three texts examined in this chapter would appear to be improbable from the outset. I shall, however, take a different perspective from those histories and commentaries which are concerned with tracing the narrative of the development of theories of aesthetics, and will eschew almost entirely any discussion of the differences between these texts taken as systematic inquiries into the sublime. The main emphasis throughout, as stated above, will be on the adequacy of each system, taken in its own terms, to theorize the experience of sublimity, and to construct a theory which corresponds to the experience it describes and analyses.

Thus, although Burke used a different framework for analysis from Gerard and Kames in their attempts to understand the transmission of ideas, passions, sensations and so forth, these differences count for very little when we look at how he constructs an analytical discourse which sets out to explain and describe sublimity. Again, while Burke's notions about the role of terror in sublime experience depart from those of almost all his contemporaries, including of course Gerard and Kames, this idiosyncrasy has very little bearing on our argument which is not concerned with the origins or stimuli for sublime sensation. So much for a counterclaim that these three texts are irreducibly different. The opposite perception, that these texts are similar on account of the fact that all three writers construct discourses of analysis in the face of the sublime might be taken as self-evident. It becomes less so, and worthy of comment when we recall that not only is the experience of the sublime fiercely debated throughout the period, but also that the causes, ends, and effects of sublime experiences were far from agreed upon. To be faced by the sublime, then, was not necessarily to be faced by the same external objects, internal sensations, or discursive manipulations. This chapter will attempt to sketch some of the reasons for the proximity of the three texts under discussion given these potential (substantial) differences.

Burke's added section on power is primarily concerned with the idea of godhead, although it takes two pages before Burke openly states this:

I purposely avoided when I first considered this subject, to introduce the idea of that great and tremendous being, as an example in an argument so light as this; though it frequently occurred to me, not as an objection to, but as a strong confirmation of my notions in this matter.<sup>4</sup>

Burke's reverential position in regard to the 'great and tremendous being' hides a more problematic utilization of the lapse: for the first edition knowingly, 'purposely', omits what amounts to nothing less than the hinge of articulation or foundation stone of the entire system. The restoration by Burke in order to part of the argument seems to have been thought necessary by Burke in order to silence dissenting comments upon the first edition. It can, therefore, be taken as of considerable significance that the second edition seeks to convince through the revelation of something that was present to the text in the first place, the figure in the carpet of the first edition, which we now learn is the part godhead plays in the argument: namely, the summit of any progression toward sublimity.

It is noteworthy, and of considerable interest to us therefore that the added section begins with the following sentence: 'Besides these things which *directly* suggest the idea of danger, and those which produce a similar effect from a mechanical cause, I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power' [64]. It might appear from this that the addition of a section on power should take its place as the most significant part of the treatise, and the analysis it puts forward as the crucial element capable of bearing the entire explanatory weight of the *Enquiry*. We should begin by noting then how small a difference is made by the addition: it is merely a revelation of what had, in fact, been present to, if not present in the treatise from the start. This apparently small difference can be explained in terms of the function of section V, 'On Power', in relation to the entire treatise, for while it has nothing substantial to add in so far as the taxonomy of the causes of sublimity is concerned – it merely includes one further cause – in terms of the adequacy of the theory as theory it effects its closure, transforming a partial account of the content or substance of sublime sensation into a coherent and all-encompassing theoretical model of the form and function of the sublime itself. It enacts the transformation of a descriptive system into a theoretical model, and in doing so the self-awareness of the theory as theory, its own sense of its completeness and its faith in its closure and theoretical adequacy is realized. As a consequence of this the extent to which the analytic framework interferes within the experiential increases. Where before the theory had been primarily about the origin and causes of the sublime, it now comes close to a theory that itself might produce sublimity. In this way it enters into the distance of the sublime.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. J. T. Boulton (London, 1958), pp. 67–8. All further references will be given in the text and are to this edition.

<sup>5</sup> It strikes me as very far from coincidental that this description of the relationship between the analytic theory on sublime sensation and the experience it strives to theorize is identical to certain descriptions of history writing: see most notably Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973). I mean, of course, to investigate the methods and procedures of an historical enterprise which acknowledges its constitutive or constructive functions in relation to its objects of study through the example of this chapter.

It would be stretching the argument too far to suggest that such self-awareness, or theoretical interference had not been present in the first edition. One need only turn attention towards Burke's comments on language in order to recognize the potential for such a theoretical position. One source for this attention to language is clearly the Longinian sublime which is little more than an explanation of the effects of elevated language. Burke, however, proposes a more complex notion of figured or poetic language than the Longinians. This is immediately apparent from the unsettling analyses of poetry in the *Enquiry*, which never quite settle into the prevailing rhetorical mode of criticism we are led to expect.<sup>6</sup> Rather, Burke seems to view language as in itself empowered, as if it has a power to the sublime independent of users, and as if it has a substantiality uniquely its own:

... there are words, and certain dispositions of words, which being peculiarly devoted to passionate subjects, and always used by those who are under the influence of any passion: they touch and move us more than those which far more clearly and distinctly express the subject matter. We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description. [175]

The network of associations surrounding 'sympathy', 'influence' and 'passion' certainly includes the ethics contained within an earlier project of eighteenth-century aesthetics and which is usually linked to the names of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.<sup>7</sup> Burke is also motioning towards a more general discourse of emotion and sensation in which words themselves have almost physical existence: they 'touch' and 'move' us in the above citation. However, Burke's text exceeds both of these generally operative discursive models, as can be most easily detected in the last sentence. For, the sense of the passage would seem to require that 'we yield to sympathy' on account of language's imprecision: those words which remain indistinct affect us the most. But what is unusual in the sentence is that 'we' refuse to description, when it is the indistinctness of certain words that is being exemplified. Taken in another sense the sentence refers to the general inadequacy of language: we may feel things, may be in sympathy with the outer world, but refuse to place these feelings within the confines of a restrictive language. On this reading language is a poor medium for expression, at least when we are in elevated states of experience. Having said this the use of

<sup>6</sup> Recent criticism has focused almost exclusively on Burke's 'rhetorical language' and his use of citation. There is much to be said on this, and the resulting connections that are thrown into relief by the work between Burke's political writings and his aesthetics are extremely interesting. See, for example, Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution* (New Haven, 1983), esp. pp. 68–73; and Frances Ferguson, 'The Sublime of Edmund Burke', *Glyph* 8, pp. 62–78. My own focus, however, departs from both Paulson's overriding Freudian approach, and Ferguson's intertextual reading, preferring to see the *Enquiry* in its own terms as a legitimating and legislating theory.

<sup>7</sup> See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics* (London, 1711), and Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the original of our ideas of Beauty and virtue* (London, 1725) and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (London, 1728).

'we' remains problematic, for on the second reading it is language's inability, its 'refusal' to convey the sublime experience, and not the language user's. The sentence would be unproblematic were either 'we' or 'refuse' to be replaced: 'it (language) refuses to description', or alternatively 'we are unable to describe' would both make good enough sense. Something excessive is at work here, since the connections between language and experience, experience and the subject, and the subject and language are all put into question, and it is the inadequacy of the theory to theorize those relations which is exposed. Hence the further turn in which the subject's determined refusal of language produces both the effect of 'sympathy' and its concomitant 'yielding' to a power outside of itself. If we take the above discussion as referring not only to the experiential but also to the adequacy of the analytic discourse, then the 'refusal to description' may also refer to the 'excess' which must remain untheorized, and excluded from the discourse of analysis: it is that which permits theory its own self-recognition. It is this strategy, in which the discourse of analysis first identifies and then excludes its own excess, that will concern us in the following discussion.

In these terms the addition of the section on power can be seen as one way of forestalling the process outlined above, for to give the name of power to the excess, and then to link it with godhead is to place within the theory the capacity to include, ultimately, anything and everything. This inclusiveness, I shall argue, is introduced in order to deflect from a more significant missing name, that of the subject, since this name can, in the light of the above argument, also be seen as the excluded term.

As we have noted in the previous chapter the imminent trajectory of the discourse on the sublime is towards the examination of subjectivity. Yet that discourse continually forecloses on the possibility of the subject: it constantly sees it in terms of an unlegislable, an unthinkable. Burke's intervention into the discourse on the sublime is precisely at the level of the subject matter, understood in the full complexity of that term. For the boundary which is continually invoked and tested in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory divides the subject of aesthetics – sublime sensation – from the subject, or self. Outer experience and inner sensation are split across the bar that divides the world from the self, and the discourse of analysis reflects this division. If the subject matter – sublime experience – were to leak into the subject, if consciousness were to become both the means by which the sublime was mediated, from world to consciousness, and produced. The agenda under discussion, then, is the formation, persistence and intelligibility of subjectivity, and it is the transformation of this agenda into a productive and problematic motivating force within the discourse of analysis, the recognition of it as that force, which I wish to point to in Burke's *Enquiry*.

Hence the following reading will apply considerable pressure to Burke's concern with the language of analysis and description, that which is able to 'clearly and distinctly express the subject matter'. The problem with the subject

of aesthetics as much as with the subject produced by aesthetics, as Burke comes to recognize, is that it is only a leakage, an excess or residue produced by the discourse of analysis. This excess may also take on further complicated attributes as it, in turn, is folded back within the description produced by the analysis, and is given a place within the taxonomy and a name by which to identify it. This is the process we have already noted at work in the added section on power, where a previous 'unnameable' is forced into the taxonomy produced by the theory, its exclusion and excessive nature rendered harmless as the theory closes the leak.

Power is the name given to this discursive excess, and is the leakage produced by the discourse of analysis; but if we are to understand the full implications of this naming we should be aware of the self-referentiality underscored by this strategy. As I have suggested, the subject is the latent agenda of eighteenth-century aesthetics, consequently Burke's move in which he names power as the *primum mobile* of the sublime must be seen, at least at some level, as a deflection from or refusal of the name of the subject. Furthermore, in the place of the name of the subject it is the discursive power of the discourse of analysis, its discursive power to close the gap and contain the leakage, that is named and elaborated. In the final analysis power neither resides in the outer world, nor is Burke's attempt to claim that the final resting place of power is godhead fully convincing, for the power that is articulated is fundamentally a function of the discourse of analysis, its power to name power.<sup>8</sup>

If we return to the opening of the added section on power, where Burke states categorically: 'Besides these things which *directly* suggest the idea of danger, and those which produce a similar effect from a mechanical cause, I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power,' [64] we can note that it is not unproblematically 'power', but 'some modification' of it which seems to be a feature of the sublime. Power is modified into a number of things – the description and analysis of those things is the task Burke sets himself – and in that modification power itself is subject to transformation. The work of Burke's analysis is to trace back to 'power' from the evidence of sublime sensation, and therefore to reason from sensation that power has been transformed or 'modified'. Such tracings, however, are determined by the initial assumption that power is the root cause of the sublime sensation.<sup>9</sup> In this way the transformation of power is not subject to the same analysis as the sensation which initially exposes it.

On account of this it is necessary for the work of analysis to function in two dis-

<sup>8</sup> Another way of seeing this is in terms of man's ability to name, and the corresponding theological difficulties associated with the naming of God. The power to name power could also, therefore, be described as the power to name God.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this follows precisely the same pattern as the present analysis, which began with the assumption that eighteenth-century aesthetics developed from an ethical based theory to one which produced descriptions of the autonomous subject. Our own procedures have, therefore, mirrored Burke's.

inct phases: first an internal response must be categorized and identified and then the internal sensation must be extended or returned back to the realm of external 'reality'. Correspondingly the analytical discourse itself follows this doubled movement, as it shuttles from external cause to internal sensation, external quality to originating 'power'. Reasoning analogically Burke claims that just as 'art can never give the rules that make an art' [54] so we cannot understand the structure of the sublime through recourse to descriptions of our own sensations of sublimity: we must identify those feelings and their causes, and then we must undertake to trace their origins through an analysis of the language of identification in order to ascertain the 'modification' or transformation of power. In this way power is identified as a linguistic counter, a sign of modification or transformation, as opposed to a force or quality within the realm of objects. It can be termed quite properly a trope or a figure since it determines the language in which sublime experience is not only described but also experienced. Furthermore, power is not experienced as a translation from objects to persons, as an internalized sensation of an external force, but as a discursive power. Consequently the modification referred to by Burke is a figuration: power is troped or figured into the discourse of analysis, description and control.

We should note, therefore, the complexity involved in Burke's statement that 'The true standard of the arts is in every man's power' [54]. For to be 'in power' not only means to be able to accomplish something, it may also signal the inability to perform something for which one has the potential. To be 'in power', from this reading, may not automatically include the exercise or knowledge of that power. If we adjust this citation in order to take account of the subject, we might read 'power' for the self; so that the statement comes to represent an attempt to place the subject within power, to allow it to become aware of itself as power. The statement then reads: the true standard of the arts is within every man's capacities, it is lodged 'in power', in the self or subject, and that subject is itself the result of the self's will to power. The true standard of the arts, in this manner, comes to be seen as residing in the very fact of subjectivity.

This may appear to our own contemporary sensibility as too obvious or trite to require expression. For eighteenth-century theorists, however, the recognition that the *cause of sublimity might be internal to the subject*, no matter how that subject is construed and composed, points towards and eventually necessitates a major revision to the project of aesthetic theory.

We can tackle this problem from another angle. It has been pointed out by many of Burke's commentators that he seems to hold two mutually opposing views on the sublime, the one a scientific empiricism which is only concerned with observable data, the other a psychological idealism.<sup>10</sup> If we place this discrepancy in the current context the same problems about the power of the

<sup>10</sup> Frances Ferguson, in her article 'The Sublime of Edmund Burke' has commented upon this to good effect.

subject arise. The problem faced by all empirical descriptive systems concerns the interference of the system with the objects of analysis: the system tends to produce what it takes to be its empirical evidence. In the case of a phenomenology of the sublime this problem is extremely acute, since one not only needs a descriptive model of the world but also of internal states of mind. One way of dealing with this problem is to construct a discourse of analysis and system of description that works in two distinct ways: a doubled analytic which takes account of both inner and outer without necessarily connecting the two. Such a descriptive system must be internally discrepant, since if it were co-incident internal sensations and their analyses could be translated into external causes and their descriptions, and the tendency to read the outer world as mind, or vice versa, a position that is clearly reductive in the extreme, would present itself.

Turning back to Burke and to the question over the locating force of 'in every man's power' we can note the suspension of two contrasting kinds of analysis and description. The first can be glossed as the capacity within all human beings to come to a true judgement of artistic production: this having been reasoned from the observation that taste is internalized within subjectivity. The first stage of analysis is, therefore, to look within oneself. The second stage, however, requires that one analyse the external force, 'power', in order to be sure about the 'truth' of one's judgements and good sense of one's taste. Both of these stages may come together, not in their yoking of the two objects of analysis, internalized taste and external power, but in the actual operation of power through and in this discursive analytic. The discourse of analysis therefore becomes empowered: should this happen it may itself become an object for analysis. It is at this stage in the process that Burke halts, and refuses to present a commentary upon the descriptive discourse. At the end of the *Enquiry* he claims that his purpose had not been to 'enter into the criticism of the sublime and beautiful in any art' [176], preferring instead to 'lay down such principles as may tend to ascertain, to distinguish, and to form a sort of standard for them' [176]. This refusal is necessary if the discourse of analysis is not itself to become a technology: that is to say, if it is not to produce the sublime by its 'ascertaining' and 'distinguishing' work. To return once again to the section on power, we should note that the sublime is 'some modification of power', and the imprecision indicated by 'some' is of considerable importance. By leaving the quantity or quality of modification indistinct Burke effectively allows 'power', this linguistic counter, or trope within the discursive analytic, any number of values and to stand in for a number of concepts or other words. Burke states that wherever we find the sublime we find power, which is not to say that power is the transparent cause of sublime experience; such causes are, we should recall, always described in terms of 'some modification of power'.<sup>11</sup> The subject of analysis here is the

<sup>11</sup> Rather interestingly Johnson's *Dictionary* gives as the primary meaning of 'modification' the giving of the voice, i.e. figuration into the spoken. Johnson cites Holder's *Elements of Speech*: 'The chief of all signs is human voice, and the several modifications thereof, viz. the letters of the alphabet, formed by the several motions of the mouth'.

transformation of 'power' into a figurative power, a powerful trope which produces objects in the world which are subsequently taken to embody power. This transformation of the word 'power' into a trope in the taxonomy of sublimity is performed solely by the analytical discourse: one feels the sublime without noticing 'power', but one cannot describe the causes of sublime sensation without eventual recourse to power as figure. This is what I take Burke to mean when he claims that 'I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power.' I intend here to underline the fact that the discursive counter 'power' behaves exactly as a trope, since it figures, or rhetorically orders the discourse of analysis.

The working of the trope of power in Burke's *Enquiry* is extremely complex: we could not isolate it, as we might a more traditional trope such as personification (often taken as one of the dominant figures in the discourse on the sublime), nor could we describe it in terms of another rhetorical figure – in that sense power is not isotropic. However, following the argument above concerning the double strategy of Burke's analysis, we are able to note some of its most important effects. In the first instance we noted that the discourse on the sublime produces an excess, an emission that it cannot, by definition almost, control and contain. We noted that Burke gave this emission the name of power, in part as a deflection from the name of the subject. Now we are in a position to give it another name, the trope of power, as we have identified the secondary impulse of the discourse of analysis, that is its tendency to produce its own objects for analysis, and in this case the product is the figure of power.

We can see this happening when Burke states that 'power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied' [65] for the elision from abstract concept to personalized trope – power derives its sublimity – produces an emission or discursive excess. Burke's argument is very slippery here, since we know that in the first instance the sublime experience is one of power: however, he tells us here the reverse is not the case, preferring to stress that power itself is sublime on account of its connection to terror. Consequently the power of sublimity is not a simple reflection of the power in the world, but a discursive *techné*, it articulates the technology of the sublime. It is there in the sublime, in the experience of sublimity: it is not itself sublime, does not produce sublimity in itself, by itself, but in connection to its accompaniment, terror.

How it functions as *techné* can be seen in Burke's remarks on the most efficacious way of raising sublime sensation, words. He grants that words themselves have no power, or rather they do not affect 'by any original power' [173], but they do articulate the power in discourse: hence words are a part of the technology of the sublime. Words do not affect us on account of the power they contain or produce, but because they perform as discursive carriers of power within the discourse of analysis. Burke tells us that there are three major ways in which this happens: the first is the social transmission of feelings through sympathy, a transfusion of one person's passion into another's through the medium of language since 'there are no tokens which can express all the

circumstances of most passions so fully as words' [173]. The second concerns the capacity language has to represent things that may, in reality, not be possible: the situation described may be improbable, but the words themselves cannot be denied their reality. In other words, the power language has in respect to representation is articulated in the discourse of the sublime *as* power; we recognize that power to represent, and hence experience a certain sublimity.

The third way in which language participates in the technology of the sublime concerns the power we are given, as language users, to combine words; to create new words or expressions. This use of language leads us to recognize *our* power; our ability to create reality through language.

At this point it would be well to recognize that this reading is exposing the excess from which Burke retreats: to countenance such a powerful discursive technology is to severely challenge the codes of conduct and forms of legislation which determined, in every sense, the subject. It is to give the individual a power, a voice, that was, at the time, politically unwanted if not impossible, and to ascribe to person and personality a power of self-determination that was, at the time, seen as socially disruptive. Without society, and the rules of decorum upheld and inscribed within its institutional practices, the subject would become licentious, corrupt and depraved.

It is in this light that Burke's retreat from what he recognizes as the potential within his analysis for the excess of a self-authenticating subjectivity should be seen. This potential is evident in a passage such as the following, where we can also detect a certain hesitation at the revelation of the powerlessness of the subject:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. [57]

Here the mind is both absorbed and overwhelmed by the subject of the sublime so that it is in danger of losing its own independence, its own sense of self. We have noted in the previous chapter how Coleridge takes precisely the same starting point in order to argue for the supreme power of the subject: for him the sublime enables the full recognition of self-awareness, self-consciousness which amounts to nothing less than a desire for self-annihilation. This 'romantic' egotistical reading is present in Burke's analysis, albeit in the form of a resistance to the empowered subject. For, the absolute identification of the mind with object – so that it cannot reason on the object which employs it – is clearly unworkable in terms of the residue of subjectivity remaining in the rest of

the passage: 'us' in 'hurries us on' suggests the persistence of some part of the individual.

This hesitation takes on a different aspect if we understand the sublime experience to be one of the self recognizing itself as subject. From this perspective the 'object' of contemplation in the above passage should be read as the sense of, or the sense which discovers, subjectivity. Read in this way the passage describes the mind becoming overwhelmed by a sense of its own power, its consciousness or subjectivity. Such a 'strong' reading of the text's resistance is amplified by the following passage:

Now whatever either on good or upon bad grounds tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. Hence proceeds what Longinus has observed of that glorying and sense of inward greatness, that always fills the reader of such passages in poets and orators as are sublime: it is what every man must have felt in himself upon such occasions. [50–1]

Here Burke is describing, in ways which invite a reading in sexual terms, the expansion of consciousness whereby the mind comes to an overwhelming experience of its own power. This would be fine were it not for the fact that the power which is figured within the sublime experience is not always appropriated to the perceiving mind. Hence the problem arises of distinguishing between the sense of self and the loss of subjectivity. In contemplating God, for example, the following happens:

Now, though in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant, yet to our imagination, his power is by far the most striking. Some reflection, some comparing is necessary to satisfy us of his wisdom, his justice, and his goodness: to be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes. But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him. [68]

This diffusion and dispersal of the subject is under examination throughout the *Enquiry*: at times it can be seen in the above terms, in which the fragmentation follows an initial instantiation of the subject: the subject must first be present before attempting to grasp the ungraspable, must first be constituted before it is annihilated. At others, however, it is seen as the necessary result of human society, as the product of the experience of intense passion: the experience of sublimity entails the recognition of a common subjectivity, of society.

Once again it is the double structure of Burke's analytical system which interests us, its habitual bifurcation and concomitant hesitation over the

provenance of the subject. These two particular poles, the self and society, are discussed in the sixth section of the treatise:

Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, whether simply of Pain or Pleasure, or of the modifications of those, may be reduced very nearly to these two heads, *self-preservation* and *society*; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer. [381]

In the seventh section Burke defines 'society' in two ways: '1. The society of the sexes, which answers the purposes of propagation, and next, that more general society, which we have with men and with other animals. . . . [40] so that the distinction above, between 'self-preservation' and 'society' is between preservation and generation. Clearly, in one sense, 'self-preservation' when taken in relation to the species includes and is founded upon generation. To make a distinction between them is once again to fall into a doubled structure of analysis, and to see the individual as both unique and a part of society, as 'self-preserved' through the ministrations of subjectivity, and generated through 'interpersonal' society. The self cannot literally remake itself – it requires others for propagation – because this society demands a different notion of subjectivity from that required by self-preservation. The sublime inhabits both these domains, and it is power, albeit power modified, which determines the possibilities for the subject, even as it legislates and controls its activities.

It seems to me that it would be wrong to conclude from all this that Burke is attempting to write a theory of the subject in the guise of a theory of aesthetics. Rather, I would claim that the discursive analytic, Burke's doubled structure of description, produces the emission we have seen labelled power. [If we attempt to describe the working of that analytic discourse on the sublime we find that it has a tendency from within itself to produce an excess which we might label variously the sublime, consciousness or the subject.] In this way Burke's theory about sublimity and its causes tends towards the production of an empowered discourse, one which produces its own objects for analysis, and constantly threatens to transform from a discourse on to a discourse of the sublime.

We may conclude that Burke's *Enquiry* opens up the fissure within the discourse on the sublime through which a discourse of the sublime may leak and be perceived. It assigns the name of power to the leakage, but, as we have seen, power has an unfixed value and location, functioning as a trope which articulates the technologies of the sublime. The internal resistances of Burke's text, however, restrict the full play of this trope, thereby defeating a description of the sublime experience uniquely in terms of an empowered subject. Put briefly, Burke, for a number of reasons, among which we must include political aims and ends, stops short of a discourse of the sublime, and in so doing he reinstates the ultimate power of an adjacent discourse, theology, which locates its own self-authenticating power firmly within the boundaries of godhead. In Gerard's *Essay on Taste* these hesitations and resistances in the face of the discourse of the sublime take another form, to which we now turn.

The discussion on Burke concluded with some comments on the resistances within Burke's theory to a recognition of the empowered subject, or to a willingness to assert and assent to the power of his own analytic discourse. I am calling these various things resisted 'the discourse of the sublime' which, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter, produces a self-authenticating subject. My purpose here is to describe how that discourse is recognized as a possibility within the theories of Burke and Gerard, and how both theories resist and refuse it.

The differences between Burke and Gerard can be sketched very quickly and profitably by citing Bailie on the sublime, a precursor text for both writers. We may note in the following extract the ease with which a potentially excessive or unruly quality of sensate experience is brought within the confines of the law through the simple, but nevertheless effective, means of complete or total translation from outer to inner, and then back: 'The Sublime, when it exists simple and unmixed, by filling the mind with one vast and uniform Idea, affects it with a solemn Sedateness; by this means the Soul itself becomes, as it were, one simple grand Sensation.'<sup>12</sup> The soul comes into its own: it is not only identified through the sensate experience, it also, effectively, becomes that experience. Such coming into one's own is a common trope used in the description of consciousness, subjectivity or identity. The differences between Burke and Bailie, however, are very great: where Bailie is untroubled by this intertranslation between internal qualities, the soul, and external causes of sensate experience – a translation of the self into absolute reflection – Burke stops and questions the implications of such a totalizing of the subject which is everywhere and nowhere at once. Bailie, unsurprisingly, has ultimate recourse to theology in order to give added weight to the argument, but this turn to godhead is markedly different from Burke's realization that godhead is the original and originating topic for his enquiry. Thus where Burke comes to a realization of the subject, as a product of the discourse on the sublime, Bailie takes the more common approach of denying the difference between the topic for analysis and the analysis itself. Hence Burke's awareness of the possibility of the self-determined subject and Bailie's absolute negation of it.

It is useful, at least for our purposes, that Gerard seems to have borrowed the above passage from Bailie, and expanded a little on this intertranslation of experience and subjectivity:

We always contemplate objects and ideas with a disposition similar to their nature. When a large object is presented, the mind expands itself to the extent of that object, and is filled with one grand sensation, which totally possessing it, composes it into a solemn sedateness,

<sup>12</sup> Bailie, *An Essay On the Sublime*, p. 33.



and strikes it with deep silent wonder and admiration: it finds such a difficulty in spreading itself to the dimensions of its object, as enlivens and invigorates its frame: and having overcome the opposition which this occasions, it sometimes imagines itself present in every part of the scene, which it contemplates; and, from the sense of this immensity, feels a noble pride, and entertains a lofty conception of its own capacity.<sup>13</sup>

For Gerard things are not quite so easy: where Baillie rests comfortable with the 'simple grand sensation' Gerard stresses the 'difficulty' encountered in the experience. For Baillie inner and outer are hospitable and commensurate with each other, no work need be done in order to effect their intertranslation; for Gerard it is precisely the work which produces the sense sublime, the sense of mastery and of self. Gerard, however, is far from certain about the lines of force which seem to cohere in this 'one grand sensation', and most unsure of his ground when it comes to the location of the resulting power. This hesitation is well illustrated by the repetition of 'it' in the above passage, for the antecedent is not always unambiguous. A casual reading rests content that throughout the mind is being referred to, but in the section dealing with possession 'it' hovers uneasily between the mind and the 'one grand sensation'. If we take that sensation as the subject of the verb 'composes', we find that the 'grand sensation' has taken on some force of its own, capable of striking the mind and so forth. In this instance the oscillation around 'it' can be taken to have been produced by the discursive analytic: it is the marker of a secondary discourse present to the analysis, in part thrown up by that analysis and in part its hidden object, which surreptitiously works away at the smooth, calm surface in order to trouble and question its authority. We have already encountered this discursive subversion in Burke's analysis of power, here the problem Gerard addresses is more clearly one of the location of the motivating force behind self-consciousness.

I would like to interrupt the discussion of the above citation in order to dwell on the more straightforward, but perhaps more disturbing, question concerning the subject of this description. For in very simplistic terms, what do we take to be the subject of Gerard's analysis, what does Gerard have in mind when he refers to the vague 'large object'? I do not mean to be in any way coy here, but to recognize the extreme evasiveness of this description, for although such overly generalized descriptions of the causes of sublimity are not unique to Gerard's *Essay* – it could be said that the idiom itself presents such difficulties – the expression here is unusually indistinct. This, I suggest, may not only tell us something about the registers of discourse which sit inharmoniously upon each other, discussed in detail below, but also about the omnipresent difficulties associated with descriptions of the sense of self.

In order to give a historicizing contextual frame to the following reading of Gerard's *Essay* I would like to suggest that the awareness of this discursive

<sup>13</sup> Gerard, *An Essay on Taste* (Edinburgh, 1759) p. 14. All further references will be given in the text.

lectonics was at least commented upon by contemporaries through reference to Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. Our reading of Burke's comments on power concluded by noting that the discursive analytic not only produced power, but also the possibility of an empowered discourse. This notion of power presents problems of considerable importance in relation to the status of the objects taken for analysis. We have also seen how Burke attempts to reconcile this problem within his controlling legislative framework, and how the final sections of the *Enquiry* on language point the way toward a more complex understanding of the interrelations between the discourse on and the discourse of the sublime. Blair, then, gives us a contemporary account of this further possibility:

I am inclined to think, that mighty force or power, whether accompanied with terror or not, whether employed in protecting, or in alarming us, has a better title, than anything that has yet been mentioned, to be the fundamental quality of the Sublime: as, after the review which we have taken, there does not occur to me any Sublime Object, into the idea of which, power, strength, and force, either enter not directly, or are not, at least, intimately associated with the idea, by leading our thoughts to some astonishing power, as concerned in the production of the object.<sup>14</sup>

Blair is referring directly to Burke's renowned analysis of the sublime in terms of terror, while at the same time reinforcing and extending Burke's statements about the originating force of 'power' in sublime experience – 'I know of nothing which is not some modification of power'. However, the sophistication underlying Blair's use of the Burkean return to origin is generated by his insistence on an analysis of the predominantly rhetorical and linguistic effects of the sublime which are under discussion throughout the *Lectures*. This rhetorical study almost inevitably produces a self-awareness and self-reflection on the part of the discursive analytic so that the possibility of the analysis itself producing the object of analysis is not so much hinted at as openly courted and addressed. Thus, in the citation above the 'astonishing power' concerned in the 'production of the object' is fully self-referential, pointing to both the power of discourse to describe and analyse, and to the external power we take to be necessary for the formation of any 'sublime object'. We might note that something like this tends to happen in the final, crucial, part of Burke's *Enquiry* 'Of words'.

A strong reading of Blair's comments brings into focus the friction between the discourse on power, on the origin of the sublime, and the discourse of power, the analytic of the sublime. To experience that friction is to realize that sublimity is not only intimately connected to power, nor, indeed, that the power experienced is a similar power to that which is contained by the object, but also that an internal power, within the mind or within discourse can produce the

<sup>14</sup> Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, I, pp 55–6.

object. In this manner the experience of power may not only be a reflection of some outer force, it may create that force. This production can only be 'excessive' since it represents the 'going beyond', from familiarity into astonishment, of the discursive analytic enabling the process of analysis to produce further and further sublime objects, greater and greater astonishment, more and more terrifying power. It is not the sublime as such which presents the danger of infinite excess, but the discourse which examines, describes and analyses its causes and effects. That Blair should position his own enquiry firmly within rhetoric, and suggest that the discursive analytic can be best understood and controlled at the level of the figurative should have as deep a resonance within our own contemporary sublime, as it may enlighten the following discussion of Gerard's *Essay*.

In the sublime experience described by Blair it is not the object that is the primary focus of attention – we are not examining a part of the world – nor are we paying particularly close attention to our internal states of mind, or even the representation of either of these things – objects in the world or states of mind. What we are witnessing above all else is the transferral of power, from the world, via our perception of it, to the discursive analytic. On account of this, the primary effect of Blair's discourse is the insistent declaration of its own power. This amounts to assigning the name of power to language in Blair's account, so that all internal states can be translated back into external effects in order to be retranslated into internal sensation. He asserts: 'Language is become a vehicle by which the most delicate and refined emotions of one mind can be transmitted, or, if we may so speak, transfused into another' [1, 98]. Language has become both a means of transport, it moves agents from one place to another, and a means to transport: it takes one out of oneself into the world, transmitting one's personality, one's person to another person, and transfuses the world into one's self. Blair's rhetoric of analysis, just as his rhetorical analytic, is less troubled by this intertranslation than either Burke or Gerard's descriptive models. The reasons for this are connected to the dispersal of a theory of the subject which is, in part at least, the product of the aesthetic theory of the 1750s. Blair's *Lectures* were published in 1783, but as the first edition states they had been given in the University of Edinburgh for twenty-four years, during which time, we might surmise, various accommodations of the empowered subject had taken place.

It is certainly clear, however, that Gerard fears such an excessive power within discourse: it is precisely the licentiousness of language he wishes to curb and to bring to law. Hence his project in the *Essay on Taste* to establish an arbiter for experience which is internal to all men, capable of demonstration, and resistant to deterioration or appropriation. It is, therefore, in the wider social context of experience that the arbiter is both manifest and most in need of demonstration: one man's beauty not only should but must be another's. Such an extension of an internal principle of judgement into the more diffuse context of the social has effects within society which can be seen as both the product of an aesthetics

based on a natural arbiter, and required by that arbiter for its own demonstration. The very opening of the *Essay* begins:

A fine taste is neither wholly the gift of nature, nor wholly the effect of art. It derives its origin from certain powers natural to the mind: but these powers cannot attain their full perfection, unless they be assisted by proper culture. Taste consists chiefly in the improvement of those principles, which are commonly called the *powers of imagination*, and are considered by modern philosophers as *internal* or *reflex senses*, supplying us with finer and more delicate perceptions, than any which can be properly referred to our external organs. [1–2]

Taste lies somewhere between nature and art, between the internal principles given to man and their external improvement practised in the crucible of society. Once taste has been asserted, and its overriding powers of arbitration assented to, the cohesiveness of the society within which it stands as the marker for a commonality of external experience and internal sensation – a sign of the man of taste – is assured. However, to claim that taste is universal is not to explain the origin and causes of sublimity, just as to recognize the power of the sublime is not to analyse or understand it.

The *Essay* attacks this issue by producing a series of qualifications of the 'internal sense', taste, which moves from Novelty, to Virtue, taking in along the way Sublimity, Beauty, Imitation, Harmony, and Oddity and Ridicule. This catalogue of qualities is nothing more than the familiar taxonomy of external causes internalized via the 'moral sense' of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. It is only when Gerard confronts the associative power of the imagination and its relations to the language of description that the standard taxonomic method runs into difficulty, for, as Gerard writes: 'The power of imparting sublimity to objects which naturally have it not, by giving them a relation to others, is an advantage peculiar to the arts, which imitate by language: for the rest can attain the sublime, only by copying such objects as are themselves possessed of that quality.' [28] Here Gerard is taking account of the power of language to transform objects in the world which would not usually be held to produce sublimity into causes and containers of the sublime: language, and the arts articulated by it, have the power to change the inherent qualities of those objects they describe and appropriate. The power of 'imparting' a quality which is primarily identified through an internal sense having been externalized – the internal sense experienced as external quality – is one of the features of language. It could be said to be the internal sense of language itself, its will to power. Given this it is of some importance that the power to 'impart sublimity' is seen to be held in check. This is achieved by a return to the origin, through a legislating move back to nature. Gerard writes:

Hence the main excellence of poetical or eloquent descriptions: the characteristical perfection of which arises from the author's judiciously selecting the most essential and striking qualities of his subject, and combining them into such a picture as quickly revives

in the reader, and strongly impresses on his mind a lively idea of the original. The fundamental beauty of metaphor and allegory lies in their insinuating the analogies of things; that of similitude and comparison in their more explicitly proposing these analogies. By this they communicate fineness to a sentiment. Most of the figures and tropes of eloquence derive their grace from their being so employed, as to correspond with the natural expressions or objects of those passions and sentiments, which actuate the orator, or which he would inspire into his audience. [50–1]

At first sight this move in which nature is summoned up as the authenticating principle is all too familiar: it leaves 'the natural' outside the discursive analytic, unexamined as a concept, the *a priori* basis of human experience. For, what can be said to be human that is not natural? Gerard is bringing the licentious language of figuration to law, curbing what we might call the 'natural excess' of figurative use by appealing to a familiar naturalist argument: certain expressions are linked, by and in nature, of necessity to certain passions.<sup>15</sup> These expressions were held to have arisen in the precultural, presocial state of man; they are 'natural sounds' linked to the 'natural passions and sentiments' and are, as such, beyond analysis, beyond description. The drive to figurative use is, in this way, one of the characteristics of a distinctly human experience.<sup>16</sup> In the above analysis of the perfect use of figuration it is the judicious selection of parts and their reordering into a new and striking whole which marks the difference between one man's metaphor and another's catachresis. This selection and recombination is a very typical description of rhetorical form: so typical that it becomes, of itself, a trope, a figuration.

Following Gerard's line of theory we arrive at a description of the sublime which depends upon a naturalist account of figuration and a figurative account of nature, for the objects in the world which produce sublimity do so only through the figural language in which they are described. Something of a discrepancy arises here since 'objects which naturally' do not contain the sublime

<sup>15</sup> This was an extremely common argument, summed up in the following: 'A Considerable part of human speech is addressed solely or principally to the passions and affections. Each of these hath its peculiar mode of expression, in all languages, the same in kind, tho' sometimes differing in the degree and boldness and vehemence, according to the different strength or liveliness of the inward emotion. These different modes are indeed marked by Rhetoricians, and ranged into different classes of *Tropes* and *Figures*: but they derive their origin neither from artifice nor refinement. They are in themselves, the *real, natural, and necessary* result of *real* passion and emotion, tho', like other signs of truth, they may be perverted to the purposes of deceit.' Thomas Leland, *A dissertation on the principles of human eloquence* (London, 1764), p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> This kind of model is usually associated with 'origin of language' theorists, a number of whom take this model as beyond question. See James H. Stamm, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language: the fate of a question* (New York, 1976) for a detailed account of the rise and fall in interest in the question. Rousseau's work on language origin is also germane here, as is Derrida's discussion of it. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 165–268.

are given sublimity through the natural use of figurative speech, the sounds and words of the passions. The legislating move invokes 'nature' in order to give to natural objects a quality they do not 'naturally' have. That this is not perceived as a crucial stumbling block in the argument, as profoundly unnatural, bears witness to the high level of awareness of the rhetoricity determining the discourse. Gerard is indicating that while the sublime is prefigurative our experience of it is always via language, representation, and is therefore disfigurative. We do not need to retranslate the highly figured language of the sublime back into a natural or literal language since it is the 'natural expression' of the passions.

We do, however, need to be vigilant in order to keep this figurative language within its proper bounds so that the figurative expressions of the passions are maintained in a one-on-one relation to the passions themselves. This is, of course, to resurrect a 'natural' theory of rhetorical use in which the figural term is grounded in the literal experience. This restriction of a one-to-one correspondence of trope to sign I will call primary figuration, and it is the task common to many eighteenth-century rhetoricians to keep figural uses within the primary, and to restrict further figures being troped from figures, the secondary figuration which amplifies and multiplies figures *ad infinitum*.<sup>17</sup> In Gerard's theory restriction of this kind is necessary in order to police the discursive analytic and to enable a return to some conceptualization of the origin of sublime experience.

The clearest way in which such a restriction works is Gerard's translation of the arbiter of taste into a moral sense:

The moral sense is not only itself a taste of a superior order, by which in characters and conduct we distinguish between the right and the wrong, the excellent and the faulty; but it also spreads its influence over all the most considerable works of art and genius. . . . It claims a *joint authority* with the other principles of Taste: it requires an attachment to morality in the epos and the drama, and it pronounces the quickest flights of wit, without it, phrensy and distraction. [74]

For Gerard there can be no self-determining (aesthetic) arbiter of taste since that would both recognize and encourage the madness of discursive power: there would be no way of coming to agreement about the aesthetic value of certain objects, or about the translatability of aesthetic values into moral precepts: there would be no sanction for internalizing aesthetic value by equating qualities of objects to internal senses. The discourse on the sublime, in a move that is becoming familiar in our discussion of early eighteenth-century works on

<sup>17</sup> The question of 'primacy' in relation to natural and figural languages is dealt with by almost all eighteenth-century rhetoricians. The most interesting accounts can be found in Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*; George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Edinburgh, 1776); John Lawson, *Lectures concerning Oratory* (Dublin, 1758); and John Ward, *A System of Oratory* (London, 1759).

aesthetics, is held in check by a prior and unexamined discourse of ethics, thereby defusing its potential power to the sublime, and its mutation into a discourse of the sublime.<sup>18</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that Gerard finally moves the discussion into entirely moral terms through his insistent legislation of discursive power. He states:

... the cultivation of taste gives new force to the sentiments of the moral faculty, and by this means renders it more powerful to repress the vicious passions, and support the virtuous.

It is likewise to be observed that, though taste and the moral sense are distinct powers, yet many actions and affections are fit to gratify both. What is virtuous and obligatory is often also beautiful and sublime... A man, whose taste is uncultivated, has no motive in these cases, but what arises from the moral principle. [206]

The social, political and cultural values being articulated here could hardly be said to be populist, nor should we expect them to be so. Here the 'real value' of the aesthetic is exposed for what it always is and has been, as an index to social standing and a means to maintain cultural and political authority. It is in the light of this that the procedures of theory, its legitimating moves and appeals to external authority, should interest us. For, it is noteworthy that an aesthetics of response had, by 1759, produced a theoretical account of the sublime which not only threatened to go beyond the ethico-aesthetic bounds common to early eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, but by all accounts, if we follow Gerard, recognized the implications of that threat and countered it by returning to its roots in the ethical. If a good man is precisely identical to a man of good taste, and if a good taste necessarily leads to ethically sanctioned action, produces a good man, then the possibility of fracturing the social, cultural and political values of the status quo, the dominant form of authority referred to above, is avoided.

I do not believe that questions about Gerard's own motives or intentions, political or cultural opinions will significantly help us in our understanding of why this disturbance takes place. For, it seems to me that it is at the level of discourse, within the substrata that articulate its tectonics that the disturbance has effects. It is not Gerard, all by himself, who encounters a problem in the legitimization of aesthetic theory, but the discourse on the sublime which, we may infer, had become subject to constant bombardment from a set of neighbouring discourses, among them the discourse of debt, but the most important of which was the assault from the subject itself. For Gerard's reinforcement of his theory

of aesthetics via 'taste', an internal sense common to all men, is nothing but a counter to the assault of difference which arises when the subject becomes an autonomous site of authentication, and produces a number of autonomies of subjectivity. It is the theoretical closure designed to contain the objection that my taste is mine, with no regard whatever to anyone else's, and to expose the frailty of the belief in the ultimate statement of subjective response, distilled in the expression 'I know what I like (and I like what I know)'.<sup>19</sup>

This foreclosing strategy in fact produces a mythic point of origin which must remain irrecoverable: we cannot return to our precultural, pretasteful aesthetic sense since taste conditions and controls, filters and colours all our aesthetic experiences. As we have already noted, for Gerard aesthetic experience is already figured by taste, just as 'natural languages' are, in fact, in the first instance figured by figuration. While we may refine and adapt our taste through trial and error, which occurs most importantly by and through social exchange, we do not form it in such activity. Taste comes along with experience itself, and hence in order to enquire into that taste Gerard must construct a theoretical structure which enables the analyst to invert figure and ground in order to read the figure as if it were the literal language of the passions. This should bring to our attention the similarities between Gerard's discursive analytic and Burke's, in which we have already noted the figurative use of power, the operation of the trope of power. The work of Gerard's analysis is to resist that final move by inverting the figural/non-figural hierarchy. Taste, defigured, is that through which we perceive the world; in order to perceive it we must perform a further tropological turn of inversion so that we can see the filter, not the object, the mechanism and not the effect. This reversal of discursive orders is precisely identical to, and coincident with, the move in which the discourse of ethics is reinserted within the discourse on the sublime. And, furthermore, it is precisely this move, or turn, which authenticates the moral sense as the standard of judgement.

As the moral sense claims a 'joint authority' with the principles of taste the possibility of enquiring into the priority of one over the other is destroyed: aesthetic pleasure is entirely exhausted by and contained within ethical conduct; there is no excess. The most interesting result of this lies in Gerard's attempts to

<sup>18</sup> This problem becomes less problematic in the face of the autonomous subject, but the threat it poses to Gerard, along with his contemporary mid-century aestheticians can be understood by reference to Francis Jeffrey's later comments, made in his review of Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*: 'If things be not beautiful in themselves, but only as they serve to suggest interesting conceptions to the mind, then every thing which does in point of fact suggest such a conception to any individual, is beautiful to that individual...'

<sup>19</sup> All tastes, then, are equally just and true, in so far as concerns the individual whose taste is in question; and what of it? Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 4 vols (London, 1844), I, pp. 75-6.

<sup>18</sup> This move is extremely common in almost all forms of legislative discourse. My purpose in this chapter, seen from this angle, is to demonstrate the tension within the discourse on the sublime produced by the straitjacket of the law it imposes. If the discourse of the sublime is to supplant that on something of its legislative power must be given up, since its object of legislation becomes itself. These comments are directly related to the question of theory, and will be taken up in the conclusion.

take account of the imagination. For the relations between cause and effect, external object and internal sense remain stable as long as the mind is in control. Once it is threatened by madness, which as we shall see is one of the by-products of the imagination, the entire system begins to fall apart.

Gerard begins by focusing on the mistakes or errors caused by the imagination, and on the malfunction of the figurative scheme which normally translates outer quality into inner effect. These malfunctions and errors begin to produce qualities for outer objects which are, in fact, no more than the effects of its own figural operations, or discursive analysis. He writes:

IMAGINATION sometimes operates so strongly, as not only to associate, or even combine, but also to confound together ideas or sensations that are related, and to mistake one for the other. This is the cause of our often ascribing the pleasure or the pain, which results merely from our own operations, to the objects about which they happen to be employed; and of our confounding together objects, or ideas, which are contemplated with the same or a like disposition. It is likewise the source of many figures, in which one thing is used for another, as metaphor, denomination, abusion, and the like. [170-1]

The power of the imagination is a combinative, or 'confounding' one; as such it may lead to false combinations and confusion. This combinatory power is directly related to the operations of figural language, which, we may recall, are according to Gerard primarily operations of selection and combination. The imagination, however, may become excessive and produce a language of analogy which errs in relation to the objects it is derived from. The fact that false analogy is one possible result from the 'confounding' of the imagination will have ramifications within the entire network of rhetorical orderings; indeed the entry of a personal, private and individualized agent in the production of figural language is one of the most disturbing facets of the rise of the subject. Here Gerard is attempting to drive a demarcating wedge between the useful effects produced by the imagination, and false misleading ones:

IMAGINATION is first of all employed in presenting such ideas, as are not attended with *remembrance*, or a perception of their having been formerly in the mind. This defect of remembrance, as it prevents our referring them to their original sensations, dissolves their natural connection. But when *memory* has lost their real bonds of union, *fancy*, by its associating power, confers upon them new ties, that they may not lie perfectly loose, ranges them in an endless variety of forms. Many of these being representations of nothing that exists in nature, whatever is fictitious or chimerical is acknowledged to be the offspring of this faculty, and is termed imaginary. [167]

The imagination comes into operation when there is a 'defect' of the memory, and that defect is troubling since it signals the failure of a return to the origin: the sensation cannot be traced back to the object in the outer world which stimulated it. The one thing to be guarded against, once fancy begins to supply what is missing, is the mistaking of imaginary representations for real, of the effects of the imagination for the effects of an internal sense, taste. This is

complicated by the fact that the imagination, when it functions in relation to the real, not only produces the means by which we experience the world, it also enables that internal sense above all others – the regulatory taste – to operate:

All these operations of imagination, which naturally proceed from its simplest exertions, and are the principles, from which the sentiments of taste arise. These sentiments are not fantastical, imaginary, or unsubstantial: but are universally produced by the energies of the fancy, which are indeed of the utmost consequence, and have the most extensive influence on the operations of the mind. By being compounded with one another, or with other original qualities of human nature, they generate most of our compound powers. [171-2]

Gerard's attempts to work out the relations between active and passive functions of the mind have resonances within a very large number of contemporary texts, spanning the entire century. The particular variant here, that of the relation between fancy and imagination is, of course, habitually associated with Coleridge's speculations on the topic, even though fifty or so years before he put pen to paper the debate was in full force.<sup>20</sup> Gerard, in common with many moral theorists, wishes to prevent the extension of the imagination into the realm of the imaginary. This is sanctioned by the fact that one may 'imagine' things which are not necessarily 'imaginary'. Unfortunately the imagination also works in a counter fashion in which the element of wish-fulfillment or desire may come to predominate: the imaginary overwhelms the imagination. This aspect of the mind fascinated theorists of the later eighteenth century (and is a trope of our conception of the romantic period) mainly because they could afford to let it: the subject was self-authenticating in such a manner, and to such an extent that destabilizing descriptions of a darker inner self, the dark side of the imagination, hardly troubled a theory of the subject at all. That this dark side, variously understood as the unconscious, subconscious or preconscious eventually destabilizes the subject's own awareness of itself need not concern us. For Gerard the primary purpose is to valorize the imagination, to allow it its power, without destabilizing the relations between the real and the imaginary. This purpose has clear ethical drives, and draws on a host of theories which are associated with the more general questions of moral philosophy. Gerard was hardly unaware of these grand questions<sup>21</sup> so it is perhaps incumbent upon us to examine the full implications of this resistance to an empowered imagination.

<sup>20</sup> The most extensive treatment of this topic is in Martin Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in 18th Century England* (The Hague, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> He was, after all, Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic, and a member of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society. Details about his involvement in these institutions can be found in James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy* (New York, 1890), pp. 467-73.

This can be most succinctly achieved by focusing narrowly on a footnote explaining the difference between primary and secondary perceptual experience. In order to situate it I will continue with a commentary on Gerard's analysis of the imagination's relationship to the fancy. From the first Gerard is determined to demonstrate that the fancy is not 'wild and lawless'; which is to claim that the fancy does not require legislation or policing since its products are harmoniously combined with the working of the imagination. They work together and are the basis for taste, yet this quality which sanctions the behaviour of a man of taste cannot be located very easily. Furthermore, while its function is clear, its actual operation remains mysterious.

The external senses, he is clear about, are 'original qualities of human nature' [166] which cannot be resolved into simpler or more basic elements. Taste, however, 'in most of its forms, at least, is a derivative and secondary power' [166], which can be traced to 'simpler principles' which are found on examination 'to be no other than certain exertions of *imagination*' [167]. The vocabulary should alert us to the difficulties encountered here: we find that 'in most of its forms', 'simpler principles', and 'certain exertions' are phrases standing in for the precision required. Taste, it would appear, can be broken down into its constituent parts, its enabling functions and ordinary forces, but when it comes to specifying these smaller 'primary' elements we find the generalities cited above, the 'certain exertions of the imagination'.

We might understand this hedging in terms of the central problem common to all aesthetic theories; that of divorcing or decontaminating the descriptive model from the objects it describes so that it does not merely produce its objects for analysis. This is tantamount to restricting the imaginative, or more generally discursive power of the theory itself. Gerard attempts to effect this divorce by making taste a form of sensation which is activated by the working and exertion of the imagination. Taste is, in this manner, the product of the confrontation between the imagination and the real, just as the rules of ethics are the product of the confrontation between man and society; but to make this analogy is not to defuse the potential that taste has for becoming excessive, nor is it to prevent the imagination from running away with itself, becoming 'wild and lawless' and transmuting into the imaginary. Hence the further attempt to ground taste in the physical, as a part of the 'natural', given human body, and to claim that taste is within all men, an internal sense. This, as we have remarked above, is also a means of combining the ethical and aesthetic so that the moral sense is connected to the internal sense of taste. As I have suggested, however, that link is not sufficient in order to restrict the imagination and its effects on taste from excessive licentious activity. Gerard attempts to work this problem out in the chapter on Taste and Imagination, and it is here the lengthy footnote explaining that taste is a sense occurs.

More precisely, it appears at the point in the text where Gerard explains the difference between a primary perception and a secondary: a point of some

interest, since the productive use of the trope primary/secondary seems to be a repetitive, if not distinguishing, feature in the move from a discourse on something to a discourse of something. Gerard continually attempts to forestall figurative excess, the progression from a primary figurative system to a secondary. Here, when the question of the relation between primary and secondary is itself the subject of the discussion, the text produces its own surplus in the form of an extended footnote,<sup>22</sup> as if the stable relation between primary and secondary breaks down at precisely the point where the theory addresses itself to the question of stability.<sup>23</sup>

In turning to the actual interruption I will supply the precise textual context in order to follow its interruptive force. Gerard, as has been remarked, is explaining or defining 'taste'. He writes that taste 'supplies us with simple perceptions, entirely different from all that we receive by external sense or by reflection'; it 'exhibits a set of perceptions, which, though consequent on these [the perceptions of external sense], are really different; which result from, but are not included in, the primary and direct perception of objects' [160-1]. The problem, therefore, is to have it both ways: taste is both a sense and not a sense; it relies upon 'normal' perception through the external senses, yet it is markedly different from that perceptive faculty. Without a direct experience of the world, taste would be nothing, yet taste is not a primary perceptual mechanism. The most obvious way of combining these different facets of taste would be to

<sup>22</sup> I do not wish to claim that the very fact of the footnote is important: I am not making an argument about the relations between text and non-text, text and para-text, interior and exterior, body of the text and margin. These kinds of speculation can be found discussed in G. Genette, *Introduction à l'architexte* (Paris, 1979), and, among other places in Derrida's work, in *La Vérité en peinture* (Paris, 1978). These speculations concern the most general properties of textual operation; they can be made, although not to the same extent, about almost any text. My focus here is on the specific interruption in Gerard's argument, for it is of considerable importance that the treatise adds, in footnote form, what is nothing less than the founding principle of the entire theory.

<sup>23</sup> This may well be a common feature of texts we regard as 'theoretical'. This subject is addressed in ch. 10 with respect to eighteenth-century theory, and our perceptions of it as such. As far as contemporary theory is concerned the question is a vexed one, and is discussed in so many current books as to make general comments impossible. However, as far as the present work is concerned I have found the discussion of this topic, though perhaps it might seem as less obviously present than in other texts, most productively pursued in the work of Paul de Man, especially two essays, 'Hegel on the Sublime', in Krupnick, ed., *Displacement* (Indiana, 1983), and 'Sign and symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics', *Critical Inquiry*, 8:4 (Summer, 1982), and Stanley Cavell, especially *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981) and *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford, 1979). Neither of these two writers directly address in these works the question of theory, at least as it is most commonly understood from the perspective of literary studies, but I have found both to say interesting and useful things about the construction and maintenance of a theoretical commentary which is both self-aware, cognizant of its own status as theory, and contextually, historically responsive.

temporalize experience and its description in order to understand taste as a secondary operation of the mind, working on the base materials supplied by primary external sense perception. But this temporalizing would make taste dependent upon the primary sense data, something which Gerard has already dismissed in his analysis of taste as the filter through which all perception takes place, and as the 'joint authority' with the moral sense (itself a kind of sense). In contrast to this he maintains that taste is not a temporalized process at all but, using our terms, a discourse, a form of representation, a means by which the inner and outer worlds are organized into coherence: in terms closer to the analyses of Gerard and Burke it is a figuration, a trope.

This facilitates a description of taste as the filter through which we perceive while resisting objectification: it never becomes *something*, an object to the discourse of analysis. It is the discourse thrown up by the experience of the sublime, and erupts within the discourse on the sublime. As such it could be equated to the discourse of the sublime: neither external object, nor object of analysis; neither pre-existing the discourse of analysis nor exactly produced by it. It is, as it were, a peculiarly discursive phenomenon, and hence the note required to explain it. Writing about the perceptions that arise from the 'secondary power' of taste Gerard states:

They are however equally uncompounded in their feeling, as incapable of being conceived prior to experience, as immediately, necessarily, and regularly exhibited in certain circumstances, as any other sensation whatsoever. [161]

It is at this point, where the perceptions of taste are described as both primary and secondary, compounded and uncompounded, that the note appears, and I shall quote it at some length:

Indeed as our external senses are *ultimate* and *original* principles, it may perhaps be taken for granted that this circumstance is essential to the idea of a sense, and that no power of the mind can be properly expressed by this name, which is derived and compounded, and capable of being resolved into simpler principles. According to this hypothesis, the powers of taste would not be senses. To enquire whether they are or are not, may perhaps be deemed a dispute about words, as the determination will depend upon the definition of a sense. It is however of some real moment, that the powers of the mind be reduced into classes, according to their real differences and analogies; and therefore, that no definition be received, which would disturb the regular distribution of them. And that the powers of taste may with the greatest propriety be reckoned senses, though they be derived faculties, will, it is hoped, appear from the following observations. We are directed by the *phenomena* of our faculties, in reducing them to classes. The obvious phenomena of a *sense* are these. It is a power, which supplies us with such *simple* perceptions, as cannot be conveyed by any other channel to those who are destitute of that sense. It is a power which receives its perception *immediately*, as soon as its object is exhibited, previous to any reason concerning the qualities of the object, or the causes of the perceptions. It is a power which exerts itself *independent of volition*, so that, while we remain in proper circumstances, we cannot, by any act of the will, prevent our receiving certain sensations, nor alter them at

pleasure, nor can we, by any means, procure these sensations, as long as we are not in the proper situation for receiving them by their peculiar organ. These are the circumstances which characterize a sense. [161-2]

The example of sight is then given, which 'conveys simple perceptions, which a blind man cannot possibly perceive'. However, he continues:

A man who opens his eyes at noon immediately perceives light: no efforts of the will can prevent his perceiving it, while his eyes are open; and no volition could make him perceive it at midnight. These characters evidently belong to all the external senses, and to reflexion or consciousness, by which we perceive what passes in our minds. They likewise belong to the powers of taste: harmony, for example, is a simple perception, which no man who has not a musical ear can receive, and which every one who has an ear immediately and necessarily receives on hearing a good tune. The powers of taste are therefore to be reckoned senses. Whether they are ultimate powers, is a subsequent question. [162]

This question is next addressed by discussing the pleasure we receive from beautiful forms, and concluding:

Beautiful forms have uniformity, variety, and proportion; but the pleasure they give us an immediate sensation, prior to our analysing them, or discovering by reason that they have these qualities. . . . This sentiment is compound in its *principles*, but perfectly simple in its *feeling*. If this should seem to imply a contradiction, let it be remembered that two liquors of different flavours may, by their mixture, produce a third flavour, which shall excite in the palate a sensation as simple, as that which it receives from any of the ingredients. [163]

The difficulty addressed here is very clear: how can taste be said to be a sense when it is a taste of or for something; when it is in itself derived from, based on, the objects upon which it confers or abstracts qualities? The final part of the note attempts to place the argument in relation to the reasoning faculties:

Suppose this conclusion just, taste would be a derived power: but still it would be a distinct sense, as its perceptions are peculiar, and specifically different in their feeling both from odours and tangible qualities, just so each principle of taste is with reason accounted a particular sense, because its perceptions, however produced, are peculiar to it, and specifically different from all others. Each conveys perceptions, which, in respect of their feeling, are original, though the powers, by which they are conveyed, are derived. It is scarce necessary to observe that our ascribing the sentiments of taste to mental processes is totally different from asserting that they are deductions of reason. [164]

The force of the analogy is to claim that the relations between original and derived are not necessarily hierarchized into primary/secondary. An original sensation, for example, may be attenuated through a derived power of the mind; it is present to the mind, in its full originary force, through the operation of a secondary derivative reasoning faculty. Gerard concludes the note:

Reasoning may, however, be employed in exhibiting an object to the mind, and yet the perception that it has, when the object is once exhibited, may properly belong to a sense. Thus reasoning may be necessary to ascertain the circumstances, and determine the

motive, of an action: but it is the moral sense that perceives it to be either virtuous or vicious, after reason has discovered its motive and its circumstances. [164]

I hope that the above has given some sense of the length and tortuous argument of this note from which I have abstracted the above citations: it occupies nearly three pages of small type, and interrupts the main body of the text with considerable force. It does not take a great deal of reflection, I think, to notice the difficulties both posed by and raised within the note: if, as the conclusion informs us, the reasoning faculty may be necessary in order to ascertain motives or circumstances, but useless for arriving at a correct judgement, for ascertaining the moral worth of an action, an action performed by the moral sense, then the entire *Essay on Taste* becomes something of a waste of time and effort. If it is merely the moral sense, which we have already been informed is equivalent to taste, and already know to be given, *a priori*, to each individual, that determines what is good, true, and aesthetically pleasing (for what is aesthetically valuable is necessarily ethically valuable), then what need do we have of reasoning on the subject?

In this way the note does, at least superficially, enact the text's undoing: it is, if one so wishes to call it, a classic deconstructive move. Yet I am unhappy with this characterization of the note, still more with such a description of my reading of it, for this intervention is not only 'deconstructive' in this superficial sense. Its purposes and arguments can be understood in another way, and one which enhances the present large-scale argument and enables us to read Gerard's text as not only, not merely, undoing itself as it progresses (which may be stated, if not argued, about almost every complex text) but as making more than one argument, almost in spite of itself, at the same time. It is this 'more', the excess produced by the discourse itself which interests me, and would seem to be less an 'undoing' than a doing to (dangerous) extremes.<sup>24</sup>

We can note this textual excess by retracing some of the arguments and expressions contained in the note. At the largest level it should not surprise or unduly trouble us that the note concludes with a reference to an external authority, the unexamined moral sense, which is said to authenticate all aesthetic judgement. This move is made both in the body of the *Essay* and in its margins: it is, as has been remarked above, part of the text's own self-awareness that produces the desire to understand and examine such an authenticating gesture. More productive for us is the statement, at the very beginning, that the question

<sup>24</sup> The results of this discursive practice may be the same, i.e. such doing to extreme may eventually destroy the foundation of the text, and hence 'negate its own possibility', or whatever. Undoing and 'over-doing' amount to much the same thing here, but this is not to claim that they always do. The doing to excess which will characterize the second part of the book investigates the ways in which the historical context of the excess restricts it, and therefore the ways in which 'over-doing' is legislated for by its host discourse. Undoing does not seem to function in this latter way at all.

of taste's being a sense is a 'dispute about words', which, however, should not be allowed to disrupt the distribution of the powers of the mind: naming the parts in a different way should not destroy the relations between them. Because of this, the argument proceeds by way of destabilizing a semantic argument in order to stress the priority of an essentialist, 'empirical' argument based on the evidence of the powers of the mind, which we might note, are not susceptible to observation themselves. The difficulties of maintaining this argument are illustrated by the sentence in which Gerard claims that the determination of whether taste is a sense or not 'will depend upon the definition of a sense'. The ambiguities of this phrase are, perhaps, extremely obvious, nevertheless I shall, at the risk of overstatement, spell them out. The primary meaning is clear enough: an internal sense must first be defined before deciding upon whether or not taste can be said to be one. However, the internal sense itself 'defines' things, it may observe or perceive taste to be a sense. It follows from this that there exists a possibility of each individual's sense determining which further operations of the mind are to be included as 'senses'; in this way the role of the subject is immediately brought into the discussion.

In addition, the 'definition of a sense' also contains within it a statement about meaning itself, taking sense to refer to meaning. Whether or not taste is an internal sense comes down to a question about the meaning (definition) of meaning (sense). This may appear to be merely playing with words until we follow through the implications for the rest of the note. For, as Gerard goes on to explain, one of the main characteristics of an internal sense is that it works immediately and without the interference of reason: it works, most importantly 'independent of volition'. This is to say, the subject does not intervene in his or her sensory experience: the world imprints itself on the mind. As the example given sets out to demonstrate, one sees by the fact of being able to see; choice does not enter into it.

Now this example is also, of course, a self-reflexive definition: it states that seeing is seeing. There is no intentionality involved, no freedom of choice or control. If we take this as a comment upon the definition of a sense (meaning) it suggests that a sense of a word functions independently of its users; that language functions with little regard to intentionality. Meanings are given according to the capacities of language to create meanings; this is an admission or discovery of the text's own will to power, its ability to say things in spite of, without the consent, and in excess of the author's intentions. Thus, if taste, that which this note sets out to define, is a sense it must also work without the subject's consent or intent: taste 'necessarily' hears a harmony in a good tune; taste recognizes 'immediately' a beautiful form; it is 'compound' in principles but 'simple' in operation, for which we may understand cognitive in principle and emotive in operation.

We begin to see, I think, why this note appears at this point in the text, and why it encounters such difficulties in the procedure of its argument. For what is



being asserted is that the subject is both the end, and powerful, result of a theory of aesthetics and, at the same time, that which it must deny; its power to the self is negated. Let us remember the precise point in the text where the note is inserted:

It [taste] supplies us with simple perceptions, intirely different from all that we receive by external sense or by reflection. These make us acquainted with the forms and inherent qualities of things external, and with the nature of our own powers and operations: but taste exhibits a set of perceptions, which, though consequent on these, are really different; which result from, but are not included in, the primary and direct perception of objects. They are however equally uncompounded in their feeling, as incapable of being conceived prior to experience, as immediately, necessarily, and regularly exhibited in certain circumstances, as any other sensation whatsoever. [160–1]

The taste makes us aware of our 'own powers and operations', it makes the subject sensate, meaningful, a sense itself. However, taste produces something in excess of this self-aware subjectivity, a set of perceptions resulting from but not a part of direct perception. What, we may ask, could these perceptions be of, if not the outer world or the subject itself? The answer which I take as present to the discursive analytic, and hence the reason for the note at this point, is that taste produces a sense of itself, without reference to the subject or the world; it is as regular and immediate a sensation as any other, as involuntary a sensation as sight or hearing; and it is this which demands comment, and requires legislation. What this really amounts to is a coming to terms with the empowered product of the theory itself. Having asserted that taste is the foundation for aesthetic experience, that it is common to all men, the analysis necessarily and against its will produces a discursive counter which is beyond the analysis itself, which cannot be objectified by the discursive analytic. That is why the note attempts to describe a self-authenticating discourse, almost in spite of itself, even as it attempts to clarify the primary/secondary distinction and to place some thing beyond reason, out of the grasp of explanation. As we have seen, the final court of appeal is to the moral sense; a weak and unconvincing closure to the problem.

I am suggesting that the recognition of the contradiction inherent in the argument, that taste is both a compound power and irreducible at the same time is produced by the analysis, and that this contradiction not only brings into play the subject position, both in the relations between mind and world and in the workings of a discourse of analysis which resists analysis of subjectivity (one of the founding lapses of eighteenth-century aesthetics), but also the power of the discursive analytic: it all depends on what one man may be prepared to accept as sense, as the limits of and possibilities for meaning. We may extend Gerard's analysis, and claim that the solution to the problem is to see taste as a discursive form, not as a quality or facet of the mind: it exists in between the external sense's perception of the world and the mind's rationalization about these sensations. As such it seems to be beyond our power to control it, being a part of

experience that is 'independent of volition', and at the same time a legislative force: it is the arbiter of judgement. Relating this to our larger concern about the discourse of the sublime, we can note that the attempt to legislate aesthetic judgement, the discourse on what is sublime, produces a new discursive form which conditions and controls its host: taste is not only the arbiter in aesthetic judgement, it also produces the objects to be judged; it is a discourse which, so to speak, creates sublimity. From here the conjunction between an empowered subject and an empowered discourse is a small step, since the primary feature of the discourse of the sublime is its reinforcement of the sense of self. As Gerard explains:

When an object is presented to any of our senses, the mind conforms itself to its nature and appearance, feels an emotion, and is put in a frame suitable and analogous; of which we have a perception by consciousness or reflection. Thus difficulty produces a consciousness of a grateful exertion of energy; facility of an even and regular flow of spirits: excellence, perfection, or sublimity, begets an enlargement of mind and conscious pride; deficiency or imperfection, a depression of soul, and painful humility. [164–5]

We return here to the opening citation of this section from Baillie; the mind expands to fill the object and becomes 'one simple grand sensation'. The problem for Gerard is to explain what happens when the mind contemplates itself. Although he does not allow the full implications of a discourse of the sublime to be worked out – he restricts the possible limitless power of taste by attaching it to the moral sense – his analysis does come, in spite of itself, to a recognition of that power. As with Burke, whose direct attack on the trope of power serves the same ends, the subject position is not fully manifest and harmoniously integrated within the discursive analytic.

We have been discussing these two texts in terms of their discursive functions – how they operate as discursive analytics – and have followed their twists and turns in the service of a coherent and consistent theory about the experience of the sublime. As I have argued, both finally resist a self-authenticating system of explanation and in their different ways turn towards a prior exterior authority. I take this as a resistance to their own theoretical power, and as the result of a hesitation in the face of the subject: for both theories ultimately refuse the individual's power to determine his or her own aesthetic criteria, to construct a taste for his or herself. Thus, while the discourse of the sublime arises as a possibility in both texts, it remains a textual interruption or discursive disturbance. It is certainly tempting to construct an historical argument about this, and to claim that Burke and Gerard were both writing at a time when it was not quite possible to take account of an empowered subject, and hence were unable to embrace fully the discourse of the sublime, whereas Coleridge, for example, was. However, this chronological model of history, and its necessary unidirectional temporal sequence conceals certain more problematic historical orderings. For example, the interrelations between ethics, theology and

aesthetics are primarily discursive before they are historical, by which I mean to refer to the transformations of discrete discourses and their various shifting interrelations, so that ethical discourse in 1720 may not only be historically distinct from ethics in 1986, or even 1750, but the various strata which contribute to its overall structure may be configured in radically different ways. Thus ethics in 1720 may be closer to what we call aesthetics in 1750 than to moral philosophy. Again, another set of arguments could be mounted here, concerned with the decay of interest in (or need or desire for) an ethics of taste during the 1750s, which would describe from a different perspective the incommensurability of Kames's work with that of Burke and Gerard. An even more single-minded argument might stress that these three treatises are not about, not concerned with, the same things. This leads us to question the use we have made of the category 'the discourse of the sublime' since it has been located uniquely, so far, in discourses on or about sublimity. The ways in which an empowered subject emerges in the two treatises under discussion may have more to do with their differences, as discourses, their different targets, needs, ends, and the different uses to which they were put than with their similarities, their participation within a common discursive form. This is to register the fact that the frame of our own enquiry has distorted the two texts under examination.

I have stressed throughout that the current perspective is exclusively determined by an analysis of the status of these discourses as theory. In the light of this it should come as no surprise, then, that the last section of this chapter on Kames argues, almost by default, that since it is confident and consistent in its theoretical work it is also less concerned about the production to an excess, which we have been reading as the production of the empowered subject. Consequently my method produces the following description which will suggest that where Burke and Gerard fail to embrace fully the results of their own theoretical enterprises, Kames both welcomes and encourages those moves into self-authentication.

#### ELEMENTS OF CRITICISM

Kames's *Elements of criticism* certainly makes claims for being the most exhaustive systematic approach made during the eighteenth century to the general problematic of the sublime. Yet, in most respects it is not the same kind of treatise as the previous two: more comprehensive in its range than either Burke or Gerard, but also more restricted in its working method which focuses narrowly on textual materials, be they written or architectural, painted or landscaped. It is this attention to the text, in its most general forms, that gives one the impression one is reading 'Criticism' rather than aesthetics. To make such a distinction is, of course, a contemporary appropriation, yet it is an instructive one, for the *Elements of Criticism* move the topic of aesthetics from the general to the specific,

from the natural to the textual. It is this move which I take as the crucial step, for it signals and necessitates a further self-awareness of its own textuality. Thus the disturbance of the text we discussed in Gerard's footnote becomes in Kames less a disturbance than a general feature of the subject of and for the enquiry. Kames represents for us, then, the discourse of the sublime, as a theoretical discourse par excellence, coming into its own.

I shall argue both that the self-authenticating subject is the result of this discourse of the sublime, the central preoccupation of the first section of this book, and that the nature of the theoretical enterprise – the coming into theory referred to above – is markedly changed in Kames's work. This elevation of the analytic discourse to a self-sufficient theory about itself and for itself concludes the work of aesthetics during the period under examination, and generates a number of effects in a wider range of discourses and topics in the period following, the discussion of which forms the basis of the second part of this book. Once the discourse of the sublime is understood by contemporary eighteenth-century writers as theory, as a technology which legitimates and contextualizes itself, the fears we have noted in Gerard and Burke about controlling the excess are no longer grounded: theory is excess.

It would take many pages to give an adequate account of the entire scope of Kames's treatise, a task that I will eschew, preferring to focus on one particular habit of analysis which occurs very frequently. This trope or figure of thought can be called splitting or mirroring, and in Kames's *Elements* enables the major turn from the discourse on the sublime to the discourse of the sublime.<sup>25</sup> The trope of splitting or mirroring is commonly used in works of exhaustive taxonomy: when an object does not seem to fit with those others constituting the general class a sub-set is formed. If this sub-set seems to oppose the first category then the sub-set is characterized as a binary opposite. Kames's turns of splitting or mirroring function, however, as the tools used to test and interrogate the vital cruxes upon which the self-sufficiency of the system is built. This interrogation includes the functions of mirroring and splitting, and this contributes to the construction of a self-aware, self-legitimizing theory. This is a large step from the two earlier works, even if both of them contained elements of this autotelic systematicity, and will be described in some detail.

Very early in the *Elements* Kames draws up a hierarchy of the passions and emotions, a distinction often remarked upon for its resemblance to Coleridge's description of the difference between the primary and secondary imagination. For our purposes its proximity to the trope identified at work in Gerard's system is more germane. Kames writes:

The emotions produced as above may properly be termed *secondary*, being occasioned either by antecedent emotions or antecedent passions, which in this respect may be termed

<sup>25</sup> For a good account of the basic principles put forward in the *Elements* see Hippie's chapter on Kames.

*primary*. And to complete the present theory, I must now remark a difference betwixt a primary emotion and a primary passion in the production of secondary emotions. A secondary emotion cannot but be more faint than the primary; and therefore, if the chief or principal object have not the power to raise a passion, the accessory object will have still less power. But if a passion be raised by the principal object, the secondary emotion may readily swell into a passion for the accessory, provided the accessory be a proper object for desire. And thus it happens that one passion is often productive of another.<sup>26</sup>

Immediately we can notice the drive for exhaustiveness or completion, a desire that the discursive analytic be all-inclusive. We should also note that this bifurcation into primary and secondary is in effect an endless generator of further passions. This leads to the description of a self-generating system in which a primary passion is converted into a secondary emotion which is taken as a primary passion for something else, and so on. We may recall that a similar chain of infinite production was described by Burke who placed its outer limit, godhead, as the boundary which the discursive analytic could only ever approach. Here the analytic discourse seems to have no trouble containing this endless production, and therefore has no need to find outside of itself a legitimating and controlling power. In this way excess is troped or figured into a function of the system.

Splitting can be found almost anywhere one looks in the *Elements*: it functions in the distinction between ideal and real presence, between figures of thought and figures of speech, passionate personification and descriptive personification and so on.<sup>27</sup> This is not to claim that these binary distinctions are original to Kames – far from it – but to note the persistence of the trope. It is in relation to representation that this figurative predilection has most interest, since mirroring is at the heart of representation itself. This becomes extremely resonant when allied to the representation of the sublime, for even if the doubled perspective of inner sense and outer quality has been dismissed as a problem inherent to a discourse on the sublime, as it has in Kames's *Elements*, the problematic relationships of a representation to its origin, and of both to the perceptive and evaluative faculties of man remain.

Thus, when Kames considers the objects in the world which produce sublime sensation he reflects that:

Grand and elevated objects considered with relation to the emotions produced by them, are termed *grand* and *sublime*. Grandeur and sublimity have a double signification. They generally signify the quality or circumstance in the objects by which the emotions are produced: sometimes the emotions themselves. [I, 266]

<sup>26</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of criticism*, Anglistica und Americana, No 53, 3 vols, intro. by Robert Voile (Hildesheim, 1970), I, pp. 81–2.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Kames, *Elements*, I, p. 266; II, pp. 64, 70, 137.

Kames is less interested in the 'description of sense' than Gerard: for him it does not matter if a word has more than one signification, an object more than one internal effect, and an internal sense more than one object of reflection. For the sublime in Kames is first and foremost a discursive form, it is reflected in the rhetorical structure of representation, mediated by a language and its user, not a quality of external objects, or even the product of our perception of those objects. Because of this Kames argues that the theorist of the sublime has great need of a rhetorical analysis, and should heed the figurations of the sublime before its effects or causes:

A gradual progress from small to great, is not less remarkable in figurative than in real grandeur or elevation. Every one must have observed the delightful effect of a number of thoughts or sentiments, artfully disposed like an ascending series, and making impressions stronger and stronger. Such disposition of members in a period, is distinguished by a proper name, being termed a *climax*. [I, 280]

Here the sublime is a discursive power as well as a natural or psychological one. Words can have a doubled signification, describing both the sensations internal to the human frame, and the abstract qualities which inhere in external objects. In this way words behave as if they were objects, since in the gradual lead up to the climax the words, or thoughts and sentiments occasioned by words, take on almost physical existence: they 'impress'.

This 'impression' is enhanced by the persistence or repeated occurrences of the words 'expressing' sublimity:

A man is capable of being raised so much above his ordinary pitch by an emotion of grandeur, that it is extremely difficult by a single thought or expression to produce that emotion in perfection. The rise must be gradual and the result of reiterated impression. The effect of a single expression can be but momentary; and if one feels suddenly somewhat like a swelling or exaltation of mind, the emotion vanisheth as soon as felt. Single expressions, I know, are often justly cited as examples of the sublime. But then their effect is nothing compared with a grand subject displayed in its capital parts. [II, 295]

The description here of the 'swelling' 'exaltation of the mind' clearly articulates a figurative network which conjoins the sense of self with a certain description of sexuality – it is related, in this respect, to the discussion of Sheridan in the second chapter. Furthermore, 'reiterated impression' strengthens the proximity of the passage to a figuration of subjectivity, for the distinguishing characteristic of self or person is precisely the sense of persistence or consciousness from one moment to the next, of an ambient sense of personality or identity.<sup>28</sup> The sense of self is frail enough, however, to be extinguished by an overwhelming one-off

<sup>28</sup> This, of course, *pace* Hume, whose famous statement about the persistence of the subject relegates the problem to one of grammar. See Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby Bigge, 2nd edn, rev. A.H. Niddich (Oxford, 1978), p. 262.

sensation in the face of an immense image, thought, or object. Here the absence of continuation destroys the sense of self which is elevated to such an extent that when the impulse is removed the mind collapses, and is forced thereby to recognize its inferior power. Explaining this in relation to the clichéd example, Kames states:

'God said, Let there be light, and there was light' . . . it is scarce possible in fewer words to convey so clear an image of the infinite power of the Deity. But then it belongs to the present subject to remark, that the emotion of sublimity raised by this image is but momentary; and that the mind, unable to support itself in an elevation so much above nature, immediately sinks down into humility and veneration for a being so far exalted above us grovelling mortals. [I, 301]

The example and its ramifications are familiar: the biblical citation is present in a very large number of works on aesthetics throughout the century, among them Burke's *Enquiry*. Kames in fact arrests his own analysis of the citation in order to comment upon two prior commentaries by Boileau and Huet, setting out to judge between them over their characterization of the passage's attaining the sublime. He arrives at a happy compromise 'that both of them have reached the truth, but neither of them the whole truth' by explaining:

Every one of taste must be sensible, that the primary effect of this passage is an emotion of grandeur. This so far justifies Boileau. But then every one of taste must be equally sensible, that the emotion is merely a flash, which vanisheth instantly, and gives way to the deepest humility and veneration. This indirect effect of sublimity, justifies Huet on the other hand, who being a man of true piety, and perhaps of inferior imagination, felt the humbling passions more sensibly than his antagonist. [I, 302]

The problem here is the duration of the sensation: it is too quick to bring the perceiving mind to an awareness of itself, thereby belittling the mind as it contemplates the object. This is not the true sublime.

The primary sensation of the sublime is elevation, or aggrandizement; consequently, when the mind is unable to raise itself to the dimensions of the object contemplated it experiences a 'fall' from the height it aspires to, which at one point is compared to the image of 'an utter dissolution of the earth and its inhabitants' [I, 300]. Whereas this dissolution of the subject was welcomed in the discourse on the sublime, notably in Burke's *Enquiry*, here it is taken as the negation of true sublimity. This identification of the mind with the object it perceives has a physical counterpart:

The emotions raised by great and by elevated objects, are clearly distinguishable, not only in the internal feeling, but even in their external expressions. A great object dilates the breast, and makes the spectator endeavour to enlarge his bulk. This is remarkable in persons, who, neglecting delicacy in behaviour, give way to nature without reserve. In describing a great object, they naturally expand themselves by drawing in air with all their force. An elevated object produces a different expression. It makes the spectator stretch upwards and stand a-tiptoe. [I, 265]

As we have noted, when the mind contemplates an object as vast as godhead, it cannot find within itself the structure necessary for an expansion to such infinite boundaries. This failure, and its associated sensation of pain, is discussed by Kames in a long and intriguing footnote which attempts to explain the connection between them. The substance of this note is of considerable importance since it provides us with a bizarre combination of statements and ideas which amount to assertions of the coherence and completeness of the theory.

Kames is discussing 'Resemblance and Contrast', one more 'double', and comes to address the effect that unusual resemblance has on the mind which he calls 'surprise', adding that 'surprise is not the only cause to the effect described', and explains: 'Another cause concurs, which operates perhaps not less powerfully than surprise. This cause is a principle in human nature that lies still in obscurity, not having been evolved by any writer, though its effects are extensive' [I, 364]. This 'discovery' takes on considerable importance given that it is entirely unique to Kames's analysis. The passage continues: 'As it is not distinguished by a proper name, the reader must be satisfied with the following description. No man who studies himself or others but must be sensible of a tendency or propensity in the mind to complete every work that is begun, and to carry things to their full perfection' [I, 364]. This notion of *completeness*, the finishing of 'work begun' underpins the entire discursive analytic. The reason why contemplating the deity is unsatisfactory is because the thought cannot be completed. It is less the thought that is at stake here, than the sense of internal consistency, of the coming to an end, the completion of the contemplating mind. In so far as this notion of completion of the self can be analogically related to the discursive analytic itself, to its sense of the self and self-completion, we can note that it is the full closure of the theory, its competence to 'carry things to their full perfection' that ratifies or grounds the self-authenticating subject. We are no longer in the domain of a discourse on the sublime, a description and analysis of what causes sublime sensation, but in that of the discourse of the sublime.

Taking another viewpoint, we can note that Kames is dissatisfied with a theory which cannot take account of everything, not because he wishes to construct a system that is impregnable, or beyond criticism, but because its pre-textual topic of enquiry, into the roots and causes of subjectivity, demands closure. If this is not achieved the subject or consciousness is ultimately not persistent but fragmentary and dispersed. Because of this Kames's need to conclude leads to a conception of sublimity which outstrips or goes beyond the sense which gives us a sense of the sublime. This considerably extends Gerard's associationist psychology and its grounding in the moral sense, so that ending itself, which is to say the construction and experience of theoretical discourse – the sense it has of its needs and requirements – takes precedence over the internal senses. In this way the subject is truly a product of the discourse of analysis. Thus:

We feel a sensible pleasure when the work is brought to perfection: and our pain is not less sensible when we are disappointed. Hence our uneasiness, when an interesting story is

broke off in the middle, when a piece of music ends without a close, or when a building or garden is left imperfect. [I, 365]

The mind naturally seeks out the ends or boundaries of everything it contemplates or perceives; excess must be folded back within any cognitive activity so that closure is attained. This is not the same as avoiding or expelling discursive excess; it is not the same move as we found in Burke or Gerard. For the two earlier texts resist their excessive productions, and categorize them as possible disruptive elements which may threaten to destroy the entire system. It is because of this potential that they are named as external and ultimate legislating principles: the easiest way to deal with the excess is to place it outside, beyond the horizon of the text. In Kames's *Elements*, however, the theory requires that one encounter the excess, and in the attempt to contain it, remove it from the boundary to the centre, that is anatopically effect the closure of the system. We might see this as a familiarization of a possible disruptive excess, and its motives, therefore, may be seen as very similar to those of Burke and Gerard. But the effects at the level of the self-sufficiency of the theory are markedly different. All excess, Kames goes on to explain, can be brought within the theory.

Accordingly, the example of an infinite series is taken as the test case for the adequacy of the system. Explaining this Kames first describes the need to collect an entire set of books or prints in order to achieve closure, to complete the set, and then adds the following footnote:

The examples above given are of subjects that can be brought to an end or conclusion. But the same uneasiness is perceptible with respect to subjects that admit not any conclusion; witness a series that has no end, commonly called an *infinite series*. The mind running along such a series, begins soon to feel an uneasiness, which becomes more and more sensible in continuing its progress. [I, 365 n]

The note continues by adding an analogy so that the infinite series can be understood in experiential terms; this is given in full below. The main text continues with the following set of bizarre comments:<sup>29</sup>

The final cause of this principle is an additional proof of its existence. Human works are of no significance till they be completed. Reason is not always a sufficient counterbalance to indolence; and some principle over and above is necessary, to excite our industry, and to prevent our stopping short in the middle of the course. [I, 366]

The general drift is clear: art or any man-made works have no meaning until they are finished. But the logic of reasoning in this passage is much more tortuous than such a synopsis might suggest. In order to appreciate the

strangeness of this logic we need the full context, which is given by the rest of the footnote:

An unbounded prospect doth not long continue agreeable. We soon feel a slight uneasiness, which increases with the time we bestow upon the object. In order to find the cause of this uneasiness, we first take under consideration an avenue without a terminating object. Can a prospect without any termination be compared to an infinite series? There is one striking difference, that with respect to the eye no prospect can be unbounded. The quickest eye commands but a certain length of space; and there it is bounded, however obscurely. But the mind perceives things as they exist; and the line is carried on in idea without end. In that respect an unbounded prospect is similar to an infinite series. In fact, the uneasiness of an unbounded prospect differs very little in its feeling from that of an infinite series; and therefore we may reasonably conclude that both proceed from the same cause.

We next consider a prospect unbounded every way, as for example, a great plain, or the ocean, viewed from an eminence. We feel we have an uneasiness occasioned by the want of an end or termination, precisely as in the other cases. A prospect unbounded every way is indeed so far singular, as at first to be more pleasant than a prospect that is unbounded in one direction only, and afterward to be more painful. But these circumstances are easily explained without breaking in upon the general theory. The pleasure we feel at first is a strong emotion of grandeur, arising from the immense extension of the object. And to increase the pain we feel afterward for the want of termination, there concurs a pain of a different kind, occasioned by stretching the eye to comprehend so great a prospect: a pain that gradually increases with the repeated efforts we make to grasp the whole. [I, 366-7]

Then the last paragraph of the note concludes:

It is the same principle, if I mistake not, which operates imperceptibly with respect to quantity and number. Another's property indented into my field gives me uneasiness; and I am eager to make the purchase, not for profit, but in order to square my field. Xerxes and his army in their passage to Greece were sumptuously entertained by Pythius the Lydian. Xerxes getting a particular account of his riches, recompensed him with 7000 Daries, which he wanted to complete the sum of four millions. [I, 367]

I have given this note in its entirety so that the interruption of the last paragraph becomes fully apparent. The argument preceding it can also be usefully examined. We may recall that Kames is making the point that the mind cannot be satisfied with an infinite chain: excessive production cannot give pleasure since it continually stretches the perceiving mind, further and further without end. These comments are made, it should be noted, against the main body of the text in which 'some principle over and above', precisely an excess in our terms, is said to be absolutely necessary in order to reach the end. The visual analogue supplied is the unbounded prospect in which the viewer first feels pleasure, a sensation which is very quickly replaced by pain as the view has no finite distance.<sup>30</sup> The eye, on account of this, is forced to continue looking; it is held,

<sup>29</sup> The note takes up nearly all of the page, having begun on the previous one. If one reads the note from start to finish the 'main' text on page 366 is distanced a very long way from its immediately preceding text. It signals, therefore, a similar disruption to the text as the note in Gerard's *Essay* discussed earlier.

<sup>30</sup> We might be reminded of the Coleridge's comments about the interior space of a gothic church and the conditions of distance constitutive of the viewing mind. See p. 44 above.

dwelling *in sight*, attempting to fill the natural scene and equate the distance of the view with the distance of the viewer.<sup>51</sup> As it cannot perform this identification the eye, or sight, does not return to the subject who views: vision is not proper, not propered to the self. This is one reason why pain increases with each attempt to comprehend the whole. It is at this point that Kames introduces two further analogies which seem, at least at first glance, to be completely unwarranted: the first about ownership of land, and the second concerning Xerxes.

If we take the property analogy first, this has very little connection to the preceding argument about either the infinite series or the unbounded prospect. It is about the completion of a geometric figure, the square, which has been interrupted by the 'indentation' of someone else's property. The desire on the part of Kames, to 'square his field', is, on the surface at least, merely an expression for aesthetic harmony and for closure, completion.

The analogy is very weak and tenuous if this is its only contribution to the discussion. However, if we pay particularly close attention to the sequence of the argument noting the sudden jump from a discussion on viewing a prospect to 'squaring a field', certain connections may be posited. The first is the relationship between a view of a prospect and the viewer, since the structure of viewing produces a situation in which the beholder may be taken to 'own' the landscape before him. This network of property relations was not only present to the viewing of landscapes 'in the real', in which one displayed one's wealth and taste to an assembled company, but also in the picturing of that landscape in all the forms of representation available (that is, not merely confined to landscape paintings). Furthermore, the place of viewing, its situation within the discourses definitive of subjectivity, was highly charged in respect to the precise imitation of the original site from which the view had been constructed or painted. This is discussed in detail in chapter 8. Consequently we may read the statement about 'another's property' being 'indented into my field' as a comment upon the indentation of someone else's person or personality into one's own: the view is disturbed by the presence of another's property, it becomes improper. This description has behind it, all the while, the drive for a self-originating and self-sustaining subjectivity, one which is entirely owned by the self. The 'purchase' of the indentation is not a monetary transaction but a psychological healing: a removal of the uneasiness another's property gives rise to when it is improperly present to one's field of vision.

The second example about Xerxes is also about the aesthetics of ownership and property. This time, however, the desired end result is even more excessive. For it would appear at first glance that the figure of four million is aesthetically more 'whole', more complete than other possible figures, such as 3 993 000, or five million, six million or whatever. Again this appears rather weak as an

argument: it merely states that Xerxes made the sum of Pythius's monetary wealth a 'round number' and extrapolates from this fact that there must be a controlling aesthetics of quantity and number. In this example, however, Pythius does not strive to achieve the closure of the sum of four million; it is Xerxes who donates the missing 7000 Darics, who recognizes the need, and who obeys the law of the aesthetics of number.

If we return to the full body of the note, in which the distance of a prospect is discussed in relation to closure we can also note a strange inconsistency. For Kames asserts initially that 'with respect to the eye no prospect can be unbounded', which is to point to the physical limitations of the faculty of sight: the focal length of the eye determines the limits of vision, the closure of a prospect. Thus, the eye, given these physical limitations, must be informed of the 'great prospect' through another sense. This, in fact, is outlined earlier in the note when Kames states that the mind 'perceives things as they exist', and, therefore, it 'knows' the full extent of the unbounded prospect even if the eye cannot see it.

This discrepancy articulates the distinctions between the external and internal senses: it makes the point that the mind 'knows' things which continually exceed the evidence given to it by the senses; that reason outstrips sensation. This theorization of mental ratiocination directly counters Gerard's insistence on the necessary link between imagination and sense, the complete identification of the mind with the object perceived – 'when an object is presented to any of our senses, the mind conforms itself to its nature and appearance' – and Burke's notion of the annihilation of the ratiocinative powers in the face of unbounded prospects – 'But while we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him.' Both Burke and Gerard stop short of the inclusion of the excess, however described, within their theories. Kames sees it as the necessary step in order to construct a coherent system, and as the impulse behind the fabrication and experience of subjectivity.

The discrepancy between internal and external senses, the foundation of all these debates on aesthetic experience and judgement, comes to be seen in Kames's work as the evidence for subjectivity: because this discrepancy seems to occur there must be something left over or in between the inner and outer; because there is a surplus produced by the interaction of internal and external senses, the theory, in order to contain the surplus and complete itself as theory, must be given its own power, its own sense. This is precisely the end result of Kames's interrogation of the doubling or splitting referred to at the opening of this section. In the appendix to the *Elements* various terms which have been used throughout are defined. The second explanation is the following:

<sup>51</sup> This term will become clear in the discussion of perspective; see ch. 8.

The faculty by which I discover an internal object, is termed an internal sense: the faculty by which I discover an external object, is termed an external sense. This distinction among

the senses is made with reference to their object merely: for the senses, external and internal, are equally powers or faculties of the mind. [III, 375]

This would appear to close the gap between inner and outer, making both senses identical in composition and location, merely differing in relation to their objects. In the same way a discourse on the sublime resides in the same location as a discourse of the sublime, it merely functions in respect to slightly different objects, and a slightly different concept of the subject. For what allows this doubling or splitting to become one again, what turns the double into a mirror reflection is the discovery or awareness of self-consciousness, of self-authenticating subjectivity.

As much is made apparent in the third definition given in the appendix: 'But as self is an object, and the only one that cannot be termed either external or internal, the faculty by which I am conscious of myself, must be distinguished from both the internal and external senses' [III, 375-6]. 'There is, then, another sense, distinct from the internal and external senses: a sense of self, a sense sublime of the sublime. It should be clear, by now, how the discourse on the sublime comes to an awareness of this subjectivity, and how it turns from a discourse on external causes of sublimity to a discourse which produces the excess, variously described as the sublime, consciousness, or subjectivity. As argued above, this excess is produced in both Burke and Gerard's theories, but it is recognized as too destabilizing for the coherence of the discursive analytic. It is only with Kames that the excess becomes fully familiarized and turned back within the theory, which has come to an awareness of itself as theory, and has learnt the principle of inclusion, of defeating the excessive production of the theory by merely returning it to itself.

The detail of the discussion in this chapter may have obscured the central point I wish to draw from it. I do not mean to state that theories of aesthetics published during the period 1756-63 turn away from an analysis of the sublime in terms of external objects to one based in the interior workings of the mind, nor do I mean to claim that theories on the sublime turn to psychological explanations based on a cartography of the mind, or more generally of the subject. Rather, I hope to have shown how the discourse on the sublime produces an excess or a surplus; it does this discursively and that excess can be labelled, for present purposes, the self-authenticating subject. This does not mean that theories of aesthetics did not also do the former, that they did not also turn to the subject as *their* subject. The following chapter will turn to another set of discourses, another set of debates, precisely concurrent with these theories of sublimity, which articulate the questions of property, propriety, personality and investigate the construction of subjectivity from a different perspective, but which function as theory and familiarize the excess in remarkably similar ways, and for remarkably similar ends.

## 4

### The Discourse of Debt

The argument of the two previous chapters has moved from a brief overview of eighteenth-century aesthetics in terms of the topic taken by them for analysis to a very detailed reading of three moments in three exemplary texts. It has been suggested throughout these chapters that my own analysis proceeds from a 'hard concept', that of the distinction between a discourse on and a discourse of something, in order to investigate the ways in which theories of the sublime function as theories, and that the use of this method enables us to note similarities between apparently distinct texts in terms of their operation as discursive analytics. The preceding chapter utilized a chronological boundary for its descriptive and analytic framework and this led the discussion towards a characterization of the differences between Burke, Gerard and Kames in terms of an evolutionary or developmental narrative. This can now be investigated via a wider consideration of the discursive network within which this micro-history of the sublime is to be placed.

Clearly the most obvious way to contextualize the argument so far would be to turn our attention towards a traditional history of the years 1756-63. This would have the advantage of presenting a norm against which Kames's break from the discourse on the sublime could be placed. To give an example which would be very much at home in a more traditional historical argument, the period under examination witnesses in a variety of ways a change from a social and political context in which those values and discourses associated with and upheld by civic humanism predominated to a context in which the ideologies of individualism and its attendant discourses of political economy began to supplant them. This change may or may not be understood as a radical alteration in relationships pertaining between representation and the human subject and it is this feature of the change which will increasingly become our own concern. The discourse of the sublime, then, could be situated next to the revision of a Shaftesburian civic humanism, in which the ethics of the aristocracy were taken to be the benevolent motor of society, into a politics of the bourgeois, exemplified by Mandeville and the Scottish school of political economy, in which

the values of commerce were figured into a new ordering of the social, cultural and political. These values of trade and exchange brought great tension to bear upon the hierarchical stratification of society, which they certainly did not destroy or replace in any strict sense, and began to effect alterations within the orders of discourse. This kind of description is certainly sensitive to the range of discourses within the entire network and attends to the differing alignments between particular discrete discourses.

One way of contextualizing the debates of the aestheticians, then, would be to adopt these or similar descriptions of large changes in the discursive network, and to note the interrelations between theories of the sublime and other neighbouring discourses of the period through analyses of vocabulary and rhetorical forms. The word 'luxury', for example, could be examined in the older ethical humanism and the newer political commercialism, and from here traced into the works on aesthetics. This would note connections at the surface level of the discourses under discussion, and might attend to the use of the metaphor of the 'body politic', for example, or begin noting connections between discourses at a different level or from a different perspective. It would generate an enriched description of the transformation of civic humanism, taken as a discrete discourse, into bourgeois individualism (to use two terms which equally require justification). Its topic would be this transformation, and because of this it would quite properly neglect to ask whether civic humanism is constituted as a discourse, or whether the connections it locates are in fact features of the discursive relationships between discrete discourses. Again, although we would learn something about the semantic field present to the period by attending to specific vocabulary or figurative overlaps, we would still be in the dark as to how a discourse of ethics found in civic humanism relates to a discourse of aesthetics found in bourgeois individualism.

As should be obvious from the tenor of my remarks I am not going to present this kind of historical contextualization. Rather this chapter will build upon the analyses of Burke, Gerard and Kames by operating a reading of the discursive network as if it constituted a discrete discourse – the discourse 1756–63. Consequently the set of debates discussed in this chapter have been isolated in precisely the same way as those on the sublime: their selection has been determined by a very simple identification of their 'object', the topic taken for enquiry. Thus, following the method of the second chapter we can begin by asking what is the discourse 1756–63 on? How can the heterogeneous discourses which flow in and out of this fictional discrete discourse be harnessed to one topic? While such a reduction of the entire discursive network is obviously distorting it is difficult to see how we could analyse the full network unless we make it the object of our own discursive analytic. In so doing we are able to contextualize one kind of discourse, here the discourse of the sublime, discursively: that is, in relation to its sustaining discourses and its own discursive formation.

These comments will almost certainly seem overly abstract and unnecessarily methodological. They form a part of the counter-narrative of this book and

represent my attempts to work as rigorously as possible the sense of scepticism outlined in the introduction. I am attempting here to reason from the analyses given in chapter 2 of the forms and functions of eighteenth-century theories of aesthetics: to make the analysis of the sublime experience given in Frances Reynolds's treatise and my reading of it productive of my own argument and its forms and procedures of enquiry. We are, then, working the trope of eversion in order to understand how the three works on the sublime published between 1756 and 1763 are situated within the entire range of discourses present to that period, to what I term the discursive network.

In response to the question phrased above, what is that discursive network about, I shall point to the prosecution of the Seven Years War as the distinguishing feature of the network, as that which defines and contours the entire range of discourse in the period. Once we take this as our focus it takes very little time indeed to note that the most prevalent *topic* of this discourse was the alarming increase in the national debt occasioned by the war. The debates on the debt determine the discourse examined in this chapter, which I will term the discourse of debt. The discourse of the sublime will, therefore, be placed next to the discourse of debt not within it; in this way causal relations between the two will not become visible.

Working this model of contextualization does not come without its attendant problems. While it is clear that in a rather loose and imprecise way the massive increase in borrowing which took place between 1756 and 1763, the period of the Seven Years War, must have had some effect on almost every realm of activity – from the direct influence the borrowing had on the economy, and hence on the price of food, to the more dispersed 'discursive' effects the war and its attendant debt financing had on polite social intercourse<sup>1</sup> – the overlap between the discourses of debt and on the sublime are far from self-evident.

One of the clearest reasons for this incompatibility stems from the fact that the vocabularies used by these two areas of speculation are, by and large, completely independent: even a very quick glance at the two areas of debate informs one of the very low incidence of vocabulary overlap. Hence, the most obvious and easily made connections at the surface level of discourse are immediately disabled. Furthermore, although various types of figural language are used in both discourses, the incidence of identical figures is small, and so

<sup>1</sup> Records of daily converse are difficult to find. *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, however, covers almost exactly the period of the war. From this invaluable source it is possible to gauge the effect of the war on his community. He remarks, for example, on the declaration of the war five days after the event: 'Thurs. 20 May... Geo. Richardson called and breakfasted with us, who informed me that war was declared against France a-Monday last. *Diary of Thomas Turner* (Oxford, 1984), p. 40. In fact war had been declared on Saturday 15 May. For an exhaustive account of the periodical debate see Robert Donald Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion during the Seven Years War* (The Hague, 1966); and M. Peters, *Pit and Popularity: The Patriot Minister and London Opinion during the Seven Years War* (Oxford, 1980) for an account of the debates in the capital during the war.



again, the most obvious form of rhetorical comparison is inhibited. Clearly, then, in order to bring these two areas of inquiry into some kind of proximity a different sort of analytical framework is required: we shall, therefore, pursue and extend the analytical models of the previous two chapters in the following narrative of the Seven Years War.

#### THE SEVEN YEARS WAR

It will not be necessary to outline in any detail the course of the war with France, since my focus throughout the discussion will be on the issue of credit and the increase of the National Debt required in order to finance the war. It will be enough to remark that the war was waged essentially over trade and money: England and France were fighting less over specific land, over the national stock of territory, than over the right to exploit various territories for reasons of trade. Thus, the war was in its very founding gesture a struggle for the right to exploitation, manufacture, expansion of capital: profit.<sup>2</sup>

While it is clear enough that this war was the direct result of the competition brought about by two expanding commercial and trading nations, a secondary financial friction can also be seen as one of the points of competition between France and England. The territory that was being fought for was more than just new markets and the supply of abundant raw materials, it also concerned the market in money or capital.

The flow of capital funds around Europe was then, as it is now, a politically sensitive issue since the standing of the nation is in some curious way often seen to be reflected in the 'price' of its currency. At the time of the Seven Years War England had a reputation for giving a high rate of return on capital invested: a state of affairs that had come about through the various crises which had caused the government to raise loans during the first four decades of the century. The war with France was to exacerbate this tendency since the funds required by the nation were substantially increased by a war fought at such distance. In order to raise the large sums of liquid capital required it was necessary to make investment attractive to foreigners and native capital holders alike. In response to this the English government pursued a policy of increasing and sustaining the attractiveness of purchasing government bonds. Consequently investment in pounds yielded the highest rate of return on capital invested in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> This is a brief and schematic version of the standard view of the conflict. There were many short-term reasons for the outbreak of war, and perhaps as many long-term. Richard Middleton, for example, states: 'The origins of the Seven Years War between Britain and France are to be sought in the previous 150 years of these two proud nations', *The Bells of Victory* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 1. I am unconcerned with any full explanation of the origins of the war, which can be found in D.B. Horn, *Great Britain and Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967); H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago, 1964) among others.

A corollary of this was that France became less and less attractive as a place to invest money because of the different attitudes the French government took towards the management of its national debt. Where England paid stable interest rates and chose to finance the debt by way of a sinking fund to pay that interest, France chose to raise loans in order to pay off the capital debt, and furthermore decided to alter its interest rates from time to time by institutional decree.<sup>3</sup> This decrease of the interest rates by decree occurred no less than five times between 1715 and 1770. Thus, a rather strange mechanism began to work in which England maintained its attractiveness to foreign investors by waging war with France – the reason for the debt in the first place – both in the literal sense, in the commitment of arms and troops, and in a more indirect sense, in the management of interest rates. This complex offensive was fully recognized at the time; one commentator in 1750, for example, pointed out the approaching crisis and the necessity of competing with France over the management and payment of their respective national debts:

France is at present as much incumbered with Debts as we are, and the Nation which first eases itself of its Burthen will be enabled to give the Law to the other, and to the rest of Europe. Sorry I am to say, that, by the Regulation of the French Revenue, such a Proportion is set apart for the Payment of their Debts, that, in the space of fifteen years, they will have discharged thirty Millions Sterling. Unless we can therefore in some Measure keep Pace with them in the Reduction of our Debt, we shall be necessitated to accept the Law from them; and be no longer able to oppose their Attempts for universal Monarchy.<sup>4</sup>

A war with France, then, had the happy effect of increasing France's funded debt, and of slowing down its rate of repayment. However, having entered into war it was evident that by concluding it this second monetary offensive against France would become less telling since investors would be tempted to withdraw their funds from England in search of higher returns on their capital. This was likely to occur in the light of the fact that peace-time interest rates were habitually lower than those during a period of national aggression. In this way the war situation was dangerously close to an infinite chain of cause and effect, in which the termination of the war could possibly lead to the most damaging

<sup>3</sup> Changes in interest payable on the debt were also made in England, but under slightly different circumstances. In 1727 the 5% rate of interest payable to the Bank of England for its funding of exchequer bills in 1709 and 1717 was reduced to 4% by mutual consent between the bank and the treasury. In 1750 Pelham had to work extremely hard to convince the monied companies and directors of the Bank of England of the necessity of lowering the interest rate from 4% to 3 1/2%, and then after seven years to 3%. Once again, although this reduction in interest was made law by the Reduction Act of 1750, it was only done so after protracted and complicated discussions involving the creditors. For a detailed discussion of these events see P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England* (London, 1967), pp. 233-41.

<sup>4</sup> *The Necessity of Lowering Interest and Continuing Taxes* (London, 1750), pp. 9-10.

defeat for England, even if it in point of fact won the territorial war it was, at least on the surface, waging. It is this possibility, of the infinite unchecked increase of debt and its concomitant production of interest, that I shall concentrate on in the following analysis. Although the monetary forms of increase can be said to be 'actual' in the sense of their effects within the economy, it is at the level of the discursive where the effects are of most interest in relation to the discourse of the sublime, since the ways in which this potentially infinite excess is legislated have clear connections to the discussion in the previous chapter. However, we will need to look at the monetary history of the period first, before tackling the ways in which the 'real' of economics became figured within the discourse of debt.

In 1755 before the outbreak of the Seven Years War the National Debt in England stood at £72 289 000. In 1763 at the end of the war the debt had risen to £139 516 800. It is clear that the war was unprecedentedly expensive, and matched during the century only by a similar proportional increase during the first eight years of the war with America, in which the debt soared from £129 146 322 in 1775 to £262 318 198 in 1783. This enormous increase of the public borrowing during our period was financed, by and large, by revenues from taxes which were £35 227 514 in 1756 and £107 787 282 in 1763. During the period 1755–60 the balance of payments fell from a surplus of £4 700 000 to a surplus of £3 950 000, which leads to the conclusion that the debt was increasingly financed by the investment of capital.<sup>5</sup>

If we further consider that during the period 1756–63, the increase in public spending nearly tripled, from £6 900 477 in 1756 to £17 885 328 in 1763, a percentage increase that far outweighs the corresponding expenditure during the American war,<sup>6</sup> we can note the extraordinary increase in financial activity during the period of the war.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that during this period many tracts were written proffering advice on various methods of raising the interest payments on this debt, and counselling all manner of improvement to the financial arrangements of the country. During this period also, the financial institutions required by and coincident with capitalist economies solidified their status and secured their grip on the servicing of the monetary transactions of the government.<sup>7</sup> It is

<sup>5</sup> These figures are taken from J.J. Grellier, *The history of the National Debt from 1688 to the beginning of 1800* (London, 1810), appendices I–V.

<sup>6</sup> Grellier gives the following figures for public expenditure: 1777, 14 117 992; 1784, 21 210 399, appendix II. It should also be pointed out that the War of the Spanish Succession stimulated a massive increase in borrowing, but at levels which did not quite threaten the bond between the total circulating specie and the debt.

<sup>7</sup> It used to be unquestioned that these institutions were one of the motors of the 'industrial revolution', a description which has been much debated in the years following W.W. Rostow's conceptualization of 'take off'.

also, and most importantly, the period during which the Bank of England rose to singular preeminence as the institution holding the right to discount treasury bills, and hence to control the market in money through its servicing of the national debt.

Needless to say, I am rather less interested in the precise details of this economic history, than curious as to the effect that this unprecedented financial activity had on the entire network of discourses contemporaneous with it. If, as I have been arguing in relation to the sublime, the discourse of the sublime is marked by the emergence of a discursive excess, the production of an inflationary element within the bounds of the legislated territory, then it should be possible to forge links between this discursive excess and the representation and legislation of the 'real' excess of credit that flooded the national financial markets during the war. More than this, however, it should be possible to describe and analyse the increased flow of paper credit in terms of the discursive production of excess, thereby drawing a connection between the two legislative discourses, of debt and of the sublime.

One line of enquiry, then, concerns the relations between capital and writing in the most general terms, or between capital and discursive excess in our terms. The Bank of England, as the institutional force behind the writing of money during this period, is inextricably caught within the network of these relations. Indeed, it would hardly seem fortuitous that the Bank stabilizes its institutional power and functions during the debt crisis, still less haphazard that the increase in paper money not only accompanies the increase in its institutional power,<sup>8</sup> but also the increase in its discursive power: the Bank became inexorably linked to, if not the sign of, the bank of the nation. This discursive effect, by which a joint stock company came to uphold and service the finances of the nation is a crucial correlative of the discourse of debt, as shall become clear below, since the elision between a private company and a public bank signals an irreversible change in the order of figuration: this not only makes possible the representation of money as wealth and power but also figures the subject as a spacing between propriety and property through its yoking and subsection of the individual to the sign of economic transfer, money. These comments will be expanded upon as we progress; the shift I am pointing to can be given in shorthand as the transference of the private into the public, and a corresponding erasure of the possibility of its reversal. This change in the order of figuration does not come about without considerable effort – the discursive and ideological work we shall trace in the various tracts discussed below. However before we get there a short and biased history of the Bank of England is required.

The Bank received its charter in 1696, and was given various extensions of its power to act as the central banking institution throughout the first four decades

<sup>8</sup> See below for a sketch of the bank's history and its emergence as the sole agent for the management of treasury loans.

of the eighteenth century. During the first decade it began to circulate exchange bills, an arrangement that was formalized in 1708 by an act of parliament giving the Bank permission to circulate £1 500 000 in return for 4½ per cent interest. In 1715 the Bank began its official management of the National Debt, which was also confirmed by an Act of Parliament. In 1722 the Bank took over £4 000 000 of the stock of the South Sea Company, and so began its long and uninterrupted stint as the sole guardian of the national finances; this monopoly was renewed and underlined by an act of 1742 in which the 'privileges or power given by former Acts of Parliament to the . . . governor and Company of exclusive banking' were set out. The Bank of England remained the only joint stock banking company until 1826.<sup>9</sup>

This sketch can be supplemented by a brief consideration of the emergence of paper money during the same period. Bills of exchange had been introduced during the seventeenth century as a means of paying debts between merchants. By the end of the century the law courts recognized bills as a valid form of payment between people other than merchants. Around this time also the assignability of bills of exchange became common, and was duly incorporated into the common law from the law merchant.<sup>10</sup> During the period 1650–80 there was a large increase in the issue of bills, and during these decades one of the most important aspects of the early paper money came about – the infinite transferability of the bill. Scarlett, writing in 1682, comments during the course of nearly two hundred pages on bills of exchange: 'When the endorsement is made payable to order, he to whom it is endorsed as payable may again endorse it, and so may as often be endorsed as there is room on the bill for endorsements [15]. The importance of this should be more than evident: writing and money, the transferability of debt signified in the signature and authenticated by it places enormous power in the authority of the pen and the act of writing or inscribing: it states, at its margin, that one may write money. This in fact is precisely what tellers at the Bank of England did do in the early decades of the century. By the early part of the eighteenth century more than one bank had begun circulating engraved promissory notes – Smith's in Nottingham is the one well-documented instance. By an act of 1704 all promissory notes became negotiable, and so the circulation of paper money became firmly established. Such written money, however, had limited daily use, since the denominations were too large to constitute a real competition with coin. It was not until 1759, for example, that the Bank of England began issuing £10 notes. During the period under

<sup>9</sup> The detailed history of the bank can be found in R.D. Richards, *The First Fifty Years of the Bank of England* (The Hague, 1934); *The Bank of England and the South Sea Company* (London, 1932); and *The Early History of Banking in England* (London, 1929); and J. Francis, *History of the Bank of England* (London, 1847). For a collection of contemporary documents see William Arthur Shaw, *Select Treats and Documents illustrative of English Monetary History 1626–1730* (London, 1896, rpd 1935).

<sup>10</sup> See J. Scarlett, *The Sale of Exchanges* (London, 1682) for a more detailed account.

examination, 1757–63, various pamphlets appeared expressing distress at the amount of paper money in circulation, while others remarked on the absurdity of the discrepancy between the price of bullion and the face value of the coinage of the realm: it was pointed out more than once that if one melted down gold or silver coins and then sold the metal back to the Mint one could make a handsome profit. It was also remarked that English coins could be bought more cheaply abroad than in England, a fact that caused a number of people to reason that the realm was in fact in danger of being 'owned' by foreigners.<sup>11</sup>

As has already been noted, it is also through this period that the considerable increase in the debt of the nation comes under most scrutiny. The most perplexing aspect of the rise in public borrowing concerned the widening margin between the total specie circulating in the economy and the total debt; this raised serious concern over the eventual ability to pay the debt off. However, between the early 1750s and the mid-1760s a number of remarkable changes occur in the discussion of the debt and its management so that by the end of the Seven Years War opinion had evolved, or perhaps been pushed into an acceptance of a permanent discrepancy between the total circulating specie and the debt.<sup>12</sup> This signals both an awareness and an acceptance of the discourse of infinite debt, along with a clear belief in the ability to master and control it.<sup>13</sup> These forms of control and the methods used to understand the unruly increase of debt – the infinite expansion of debt produced by the ever

<sup>11</sup> The issue I am avoiding here is that of the relative merits of coin versus paper. The 'clipping' of coins was a quite common practice and presented serious problems of detection and policing. It would appear that this criminal activity, along with the forging of bank notes became widely practised in the latter half of the century. For a good discussion of the legal issues raised by the coiners see John Styles, 'Our traitorous money makers: the Yorkshire coiners and the law, 1760–83', in *An Ungovernable People*, ed. John Brewer and John Styles (London, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> My comments here are provisional because of the different perspectives which were taken on the issue of the debt: then, as now, one's position in regard to an economics of debt management was determined to a large extent by one's participation in the generation of interest on capital loaned. In this respect the following discussion will be almost silent on the question of 'interested parties' and their dominant class base. When I state that the question of the debt and its expanding margin in relation to the total circulating specie became familiarized I mean to point to the accommodations made within the discourses on the debt. This does not mean that all people, from various interests within the social, were similarly mollified or convinced by the discursive argument. These are clearly questions motivated by a politics of the economic, and as such are placed at too distant a level of the discursive network for consideration here.

<sup>13</sup> In relation to this notion of infinite debt it is of considerable importance that Walpole had managed the economy and the servicing of the debt by encouraging the Treasury to raise loans through ordinary long-term stock – i.e. loans which could be paid off in the future, but which need not necessarily be and which bore no expiry date. Furthermore, the legal recourse of the creditor was non-existent, so that a stockholder could not force the Treasury to repay the loan. It was this method of raising money which was used by Walpole's successors, and proved to be so successful for financing government. For a discussion of this see Dickson, *The Financial Revolution*, pp. 244–5.

greater desire for capital appreciation through interest – are significantly tied to a particular figurative site, that of the body and its circulatory system. This use of the body and its blood as figure or trope enables a crucial set of changes to take place in the relationships between the private individual and the state, or person and nation, which will be sketched below. The change in 'opinion', then, over the maintenance and management of the debt is much more than the result of public debate: it is one of the effects of an irreversible transfer from the private body to the public corporation, a transfer that is also effected around the figural use of the body and the incorporation of the national bank.

#### THE ECONOMY OF THE BODY

The body, as a site of metaphorical substitutions and as a sign of organic unity, has a history that predates by a very long way the eighteenth century. The body politic, for example, had served from the sixteenth century on as one of the enabling figures for a description and legitimization of the state. Therefore while the connections that I am about to point out, between the body and money, are not new they are certainly directed towards new ends. Furthermore, the figural connection, or figuration of the body and any other non-corporeal term, becomes enormously powerful in the order of discourse, and as it does so the site of the body as trope takes on an overwhelming importance. As I hope to show this importance stems from a reversal of the direction of figuration, so that the use of the body as figure functions as a defigurative device in order to return to the body its lost literality. In this way metaphorical expressions, such as 'body of the people' for example, are defigured in order to return to an 'older' meaning or awareness of the body as physicality. The body loses its totemic power as a site of metaphorical substitutions, of semantic complexity and impurity, and becomes once again a site of literal meaning, or semantic purity.<sup>14</sup> In Part II of this book the repercussions of such a defiguration, which I would certainly not wish to claim as universally or uniformly present to the discourses of the period, are explored in some detail.

The connections between money and the body go back to antiquity;<sup>15</sup> however, the following example of the anthropomorphization of money is inconceivable before 1616:

You often hear of the Circulation of Money: As that ought to circulate in a Nation, so ought Bullion to circulate in the world: and our Coin, as long as it keeps a Proportion of Value with it, You may as well expect to keep Life in the Body, by stopping up the Arteries, and leaving the Veins open, and so filling the Heart with Blood, as to keep the Life in

<sup>14</sup> One way of seeing this defiguration is to examine the use of the word 'corporation', which by and large referred to a group of people – many bodies – but which also came to refer to a single body in its sense as abdomen, or more generally, body. See the OED entry dated 1753.

<sup>15</sup> See Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature*, (Baltimore, 1978), p. 33 for the relations between bones and money.

Trade, by leaving those Parts open at which Bullion enters, and stopping up those at which it goes out. As the Blood by running preserves Life in the Body, and conveys a proper Increase to every Part, though it self be neither: so Bullion, by running about the World, preserves the Life of Trade, and brings Riches whenever it comes, tho' in it self be neither.<sup>16</sup>

The intricacies of this chiasmic argument should be noted, for it cannot be reduced to the simplistic expression 'money makes the world go round'. Here, the working of the figure of chiasmus around the body demands that we make a series of analogic substitutions, from blood and body to money and nation, bullion and world. This series is then complicated by the negation of the following metaphor: one should not attempt to preserve life by opening the veins and stopping the arteries any more than one should attempt to maintain trade by allowing bullion to enter the (body of the) nation without allowing it out. The final chiasmus, in which the notion of propagation is aroused in the 'proper Increase to every Part', makes the natural link between bullion and riches firm, and concludes the citation's ideological work: the recognition that the identification of human generation – go forth and multiply – with capitalist commercial expansion is both necessary and natural. This identification is effected throughout by a complicated chiasmic network of substitutions which would remain almost illegible were it not for the controlling trope of the body and its sustaining life force, the blood.

This sustaining site of figuration is made much clearer in the following extract:

While our Money, which is the Blood of the Body Politick, is suffer'd to run out, and there is no supply, all Projects for restoring Credit and keeping up the Spirits of the People, will prove abortive; trade and the Noblest Understandings for employing our Poor, must be at a full stop, if Money be wanting to carry them on. . . . 'Tis certain, that 'till we have a greater Plenty of Money, Trade and all other Business must be assisted with Paper Credit. We have found by Experience, it is dangerous to raise that Credit too high, or to sink it at once.<sup>17</sup>

This essay from 1720 warns against the use of artificial blood, paper credit, to oil the wheels of the economy.<sup>18</sup> Its arguments about the economy are refracted

<sup>16</sup> *An Essay on Money and Bullion* (London, 1718), p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *An Inquiry into the causes and decay of publick and private Credit, in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1720), p. 2. Also see Edward Leigh, *An Essay upon Credit* (London, 1715), pp. 16–17: 'And tho' the foregoing Paragraph may seem strange, 'tis demonstrably True, if duly Consider'd, That money, or that which Supplies it, is the Blood of the Body Politick, and Circulates in Trade, as the Blood thro' all the Veins of the Natural Body, whereby every Man draws a competent Profit to himself.'

<sup>18</sup> Defoe outlines the range of metaphorical plays available: 'CREDIT is a Consequence, not a Cause: the Effect of a Substance, not a Substance: 'tis the Sun Shine, not the Sun; the quickening SOMETHING, Call it what you will, that gives Life to Trade, gives Being to the Branches, and Moisture to the Root: 'tis the Oil of the Wheel, the Marrow in the Bones, the Blood in the Veins, and the Spirits in the Heart of the Negoe, Trade, Cash, and Commerce in the World.' *An Essay upon Publick Credit*, (London, 1710), p. 9.

through its belief in a pure and plentiful blood supply as a necessity for a healthy state: if the blood remains pure and the currency based in material wealth both the body politic and trade will stay healthy. We should note, however, that the author does recognize the need for some 'paper credit' in order to assist trade, the vital force for producing wealth and health, while at the same time cautioning against the raising of this credit too high. Such careful cautionary remarks become increasingly rare during the war years, as the old predictions of collapse and ruin made in the years prior to the war and at its opening came to be seen as mere scares. Indeed, it is quite common to find during the 1760s jeers at such an old-fashioned superstition – a sign of the new commercialism having come of age, come into power – and assertions that a healthy national debt is representative of, if not productive of, a healthy nation:

In the beginning of the present Century, when *England* was about twenty Million in Debt; many sullen Politicians daily alarmed the Public with prophetic Threats, that, if the said Debt were not gradually discharged, *England* must be undone. *England*, notwithstanding plunged deeper and deeper in Debt, and, yet, rose higher and higher in Wealth, Power, and Credit.<sup>19</sup>

Here the connection between a healthy debt and a healthy, wealthy nation is made quite explicit. I would maintain that this connection could not have been made without the powerful figuration in which the body of the individual came to be represented under and in the sign of the body of the nation, nor without the individual's participation in that body through the operation of credit: his loaning the government money, his blood. These coercive forces determine the representation of the individual's participation in the public debt in terms of the blood's circulation in the body. This defiguration and refiguration of the body permits and produces the individual's identification with the nation, and it is through the discourse of debt that this change in rhetorical ordering comes about.

We can see this emergent new rhetorical ordering, in which the relationship between the individual and the state comes under severe coercive pressure, in *An Essay on Public Credit* published in 1748 at the point where the author strives to forge the link between the debts incurred by the nation and the constitution of the country. This connection is extremely important, since it attempts to place responsibility for the debt squarely on the shoulders of every individual. More than this, however, it also implicitly argues that a free nation, one that upholds the unwritten constitution and government by consent, necessarily incurs debt in the form of public credit. The terms that we will see over and over again are loaded to an extraordinary degree, for public credit, in its primary sense, nearly always refers to the money raised by government in order to provide various services – the most obvious of course being the army and navy – but its secondary

<sup>19</sup> A Proposal for the Restoration of Public Wealth and Credit, in a Letter (Dublin, 1760), p. 12.

sense, that of the public consent, or the expression of confidence by the public in government, hovers dangerously close to and threatens to make another, and perhaps more unsettling point.

This becomes apparent if public credit in its secondary sense, the consent of the people in government, is taken as the primary meaning in the following statement, thereby making the links between the national debt and the constitution manifest: '... if it were possible honestly to discharge the *Whole National Debt*, which would therefore annihilate the *Public Credit*, such Losses and Inconveniences would rise from the Loss of it, to *Trade and Commerce*, as would greatly diminish the *Riches of our Country*'.<sup>20</sup> It is left to us to make the connection between government and sustaining the debt, between 'public credit' as an expression of confidence in government and 'national debt' as the debt government owes the individuals who constitute the nation: should we read these comments in this way it is clearly our duty or necessity to maintain the links between the two. Without that expression of goodwill, without casting our vote through the maintenance of the debt the constitution would collapse. This is indeed spelled out by the author: '... the *Debts of the Public* are a Part of the *Constitution*, interwoven with all kinds of *Property*, and ... they cannot be separated, without *subverting the constitution*.' [5]<sup>21</sup>

Public credit is both the individual's expression of confidence in the constitution and the index to the individual's public standing. These two facets of public credit are brought together through the agency of the individual's mortgage of his own standing to the state, for just as each person who 'promises to pay' another must be in good standing with his creditor – his public credit must be good<sup>22</sup> – so the public debt represents the individual's faith in the government. A continuing spiral of speculation and mortgage, however, rapidly brings into the discussion the question over property, since ownership of the public credit may, in the last resort, lead not only to considerable elevation in society but also to its opposite, bankruptcy. Furthermore, public credit in the sense of the national debt can be said to be the property of the state, yet as a property it is clearly negative. These comments may seem speculative in the extreme at this point, but they become less so in the light of the following citation from the same essay in which an awareness of the full complexity of the term 'credit' is displayed:

<sup>20</sup> *An essay on public credit* (London, 1748), p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> These comments, and those following on public credit are written in the shadow of J.G.A. Pocock's collection of essays *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985). Unfortunately his book appeared after this chapter had been substantially written; wherever possible, however, I have indicated the commensurability between the views expressed here and those in Professor Pocock's collection.

<sup>22</sup> See Pocock on this, *Virtue*, p. 98.

Numbers of those who had great credit with the Public, from their being esteem'd Gentlemen of *Experience, Wisdom, and Judgment*, with regard to the *Public Credit*, thought it impracticable to raise *three Millions*, by Subscription, in the Year 1746; but the Event convinc'd them of their Error. In the Year 1747 five Millions wou'd have been raised with greater Ease, had not the *Scheme* been oppos'd. [22]

A considerable paradox arises, then: the public debt is the debt payable by government to the individuals who lend it money, yet it is not the property of those individuals, rather, it belongs to the state. Furthermore, as the debt increases or even continues at the same level so the proximity of the individual's identity with the state increases or continues. In this way the debt comes to be the sign of the people's confidence in government, the mark of their consent to be governed. It is easy enough to see that considerable pressure is brought to bear on the previous conceptualization of money and the body by this, since the most obvious way of seeing the debt is as a parasitic force on the economy and/or the individual, as an unhealthy bloodsucker on the body politic.

This is precisely how Lord Elbank treats the relationship:

The landed and the trading interests, like that of the different members of the same body, are inseparable – To say the land is worth so much, and the industry worth so much, is to speak improperly – The land would be of no value without the industry of the people, nor could they have the means of exerting their industry without the land. Whatever hurts the one, must affect the other: but the public debt is like some leeches, which will suck the blood from the whole body, whatever member they are applied to, and will never quit hold while there is a drop left.<sup>23</sup>

The anthropomorphism is clear: the economy is an organism like the human body, and depends upon all its members for its continuing health, albeit that this dependency is broken across the bar of property: the people provide industry, the landed gentry property. The public debt, in this case, is not an expression of the individual's consent in government and to be governed; it is, rather, an illness that affects the nation and the individuals who constitute it, as Elbank goes on to say in the same tract:

The public debt, then, is an absolute alienation, with privilege of redemption, of a considerable part of the means of subsistence of every individual in *Great Britain*, which he would have a right to possess and bestow on himself and family, was it not for said debt, and which he is now obliged to pay to another because of that debt. [4–5]

In order to expose as fully as possible the working of this figure in which the debt is seen as the destabilizing virus within the body politic it is necessary to press Elbank's statement about speaking 'improperly'. For, as will be discussed at some length in chapter 6, to 'speak properly' has manifold reverberations

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Murray, Lord Elbank, *An Inquiry into the original and consequence of the Public Debt* (Edinburgh, 1753), p. 2.

throughout this period, nearly all of which come down to a question of property.<sup>24</sup>

Property is clearly linked to the individual: what one owns is termed one's property, that is clear enough.<sup>25</sup> However, to what extent can one's property be said to be representative of one's self? This question is further complicated when the issue of public property is raised, most vexingly when that property is a debt. The extent to which the problem occupies Elbank is succinctly demonstrated by the first page of his inquiry. He writes:

... it may be necessary to explain what is meant by *money'd property*: ... The chief subject of what is now meant by *money'd property*, is the national debt; and it is called *money'd property*, only in opposition to the *landed*, and because of the facility of turning it into money; not that any body is silly enough to imagine, that there does exist, or that it is necessary there should exist, money enough in the kingdom to answer it.<sup>26</sup>

Something has troubled the state of credit with alarming rapidity, for this document, published in 1753, predates the massive increase in the National Debt occasioned by the Seven Years War, although it postdates a similar percentage increase between 1739 and 1748. Elbank needs to cement the notion of 'money'd property' to the national debt in order to make two crucial points: the first that 'money'd property' and those who own it are absolutely distinct from 'landed property' and those who are born to it, and the second that the land, in the last resort, underwrites money. For if the paper money circulating in the economy – the national debt by another name – were to be based on the existence of real money it would be necessary for the land to be 'turned into money'. Such a troping would be much more than discursive, of course: it would represent precisely the mortgaging of the land to money, and the erosion of the landed interest in favour of the moneyed. It is because of this that money cannot be allowed property rights, as it were; the distinction between land and money must be absolute if the status quo is to remain. Elbank is certainly aware of this, and of the pressure to reconceive of the relations between land and history as the speculative society of credit and paper money forcefully appropriates the means of the individual's historical representation; genealogy made flesh, as it were, in the land, the inheritance of property. It is because of this pressure that Elbank is driven to claim that the relation between

<sup>24</sup> The word 'property' has an extremely complicated series of connotations during the eighteenth century which can be given in shorthand by noting the connection between propriety and property, and the use of 'to proper' as to make one's own.

<sup>25</sup> Property becomes during the period, the determining factor in relation to personality and government. This is Pocock's view, *Virtue*, p. 109, with which I am in accord. His analysis of the changing ratios between 'virtue' and 'corruption', or between 'landed interests' and 'monied interests' (p. 109) seems extremely germane to my argument here.

<sup>26</sup> Elbank, *An Inquiry*, p. 1. Further extracts from this source are given the p. no. only.

credit and coin is a frivolous, 'silly', and unnecessary one – even if he may have advanced this analysis on economic grounds – thereby discrediting those who speculate in paper money which is here to be understood as not being real property. Thus, while this argument mollifies the landed interest in their fears about the bankruptcy of the nation it correspondingly disenfranchises the commercial interests from the ownership of property. Property, propriety, personality are the signs of privilege, of the landed class; none of these things may be bought with money.

Property, as far as Elibank is concerned, must underwrite money, but not be transferable into it. Indeed, property is the last bastion and foundation of the Bank of England whose constitution requires a minimum holding of landed property for each of its directors.<sup>27</sup> It is also that which represents the nation, for what is England if it is not the territory its government governs and its King rules? It is this latter connection which Elibank is concerned about, since the changing ratio between 'money'd property' and 'landed property' in favour of the former essentially signifies a change in the representational relationships between land and government, property and state, which can only be seen as an erosion of the power in the hands of the landed property owners.

This hardly needs further explication, given that the entry of commercial interests into eighteenth-century economy and society has long been understood in these terms. However, this analysis of the function of the National Debt in the possible erosion of that class power and privilege is worth noting, for Elibank is also concerned about the different 'interests' within society, most especially in regard to whose interests are served by the maintenance of the National Debt. The primary divisive effect of the debt is the introduction of a number of distinct and competing interests into the social and political fabric of the nation, and so the public debt is seen once again as a virus that spreads division throughout the 'body of the people':

The public debt has produced a difference of interests in this country, that we have lately suffered by; and, if not remedied, can have no end. It is the interest of the stockholders, to involve the nation in war, because they get by it. It is the interest of landed men and merchants, to submit to any insult rather than engage in war, since they must bear the whole burden of it. And however contemptible one may think the weight of the former in comparison of that of the latter, it was their superior influence that involved the nation in the late frivolous war with Spain. [16].

<sup>27</sup> See R.D. Richards, *The Early History of Banking in England* (London, 1929), and for a contemporary account *An Essay on the Means of Discharging the National Debt* (London, 1763), pp. 26–7. It is absolutely required that the Directors of this Bank, though but agents under a Committee of the House of Commons, should be possessed of considerable landed property, which is to be unalienable and answerable for their conduct during their continuance in that trust: which must be allowed a better security than the monied qualification of any Director, whose whole property, be it ever so considerable in that shape, may be transferred to another kingdom in a post-letter. These comments underline the fact that a national bank must be rooted in the soil, a point that will become more important as we progress.

The end result of this divisive split in 'interests' is the reorganization of the ownership of the land, a point made by Elibank in its hardest social terms, in order to make the point that a clash of 'interests' leads to a restructuring of society. This point was more often made in nationalist terms, a more surreptitious form of the same argument.<sup>28</sup> This states in its baldest formulation that the nation, should it continue financing a large debt, would pass over into the ownership of those foreigners who invested their liquid capital.<sup>29</sup> The former argument, however, is more telling, and is put by Elibank:

When the art of funding was first introduced, the common talk of mankind was, that the people, or England, must be undone . . . . All that could be meant by the assertion was, that the then possessors and their posterity must be undone, and their inheritances given away from them, and become the property of other men . . . . At present, that is, sixty years after the Revolution, one tenth of the land of *England* is not possessed by the posterity or heirs of those who possessed it at that time. And if the *extermination* (as it may justly be termed) is not universal, it is only because there were a few overgrown estates, such as the *Devonshire, Bedford, Curzon* etc which were proof against the waste of luxury and taxes. [22]

History, the unbroken ownership of land, is threatened by the public debt: the stability of England is undone through the transfer of property. Once again Elibank's position in regard to this awareness and acceptance of modernity – the modernity of speculation and excess – is duplicitous. On the one hand he wants to dispel fears about the 'undoing' of the nation, while on the other he wants to censure the transfer of the ownership of property – the moral tone of 'extermination' gives us that index – from the landed to the monied. The final comment reinforces both moral and political/economic points: it is only on account of the enormous land holdings of the Lords Devonshire, Bedford, and Curzon that 'luxury', the immoral waste of wealth, and 'taxes', the immoral cost of public credit, had not claimed even more land. The slippage in this comment between 'the people' and 'England' requires further comment, however, since it is this protonationalist gesture which is increasingly made by the use of the body as a defigured trope.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See *Reasons for the more speedy lessening the National Debt* (London, 1737), pp. 22–3. 'The public Funds) divide the Nation into two Ranks of Men, of which one are *Creditors* and the other *Debtors*: the *Creditors* are the *Three Great Corporations* and others, made up of *Natives* and *Foreigners*; the *Debtors* are the *Land-holders*, the *Merchants*, the *Shop-keepers*, and all *Ranks* and *Degrees* of Men throughout the Kingdom.'

<sup>29</sup> See Elibank, p. 17: 'Amongst the bad effects of the public debt, we must not omit the particular loss the nation suffers by the share of it belonging to foreigners residing abroad.'

<sup>30</sup> Examples are legion: one typical form of the trope is the following stricture against luxury, which corrupts the physical body and therefore leads to the eventual emasculation of the 'body of the nation': 'For luxury, by its constant, and natural consequences, leads to a state of destruction: it not only emasculates the minds, and debilitates the bodies of the people, but deprives them of their industry, which is the strength of every state: for no other people were ever at once luxurious and industrious.' *London Magazine*, XXVII (May, 1758), p. 223.

We have already noted the ways in which money is related to the body in terms of its being the 'life-blood' of the nation: money is the public manifestation of a private necessity, blood. The nation, however, may take within its body an infectious disease, credit. Should it do this the body politic, or the nation understood as a corporeal whole, will be fractured and split into different interests as the ownership of property reorganizes social and political power. It remains to ask what happens to the individual in this scheme of things.

Elibank's response to this is unsurprising: if 'money'd property' continues to increase through the financing of the public debt it will lead to the depravity of the individual:

The public debt has entailed immorality and idleness upon the people: and the civil magistrate, whose chief office it ought to be to restrain vice, is forced to connive at it. The revenue cannot be supported without encouraging idleness and expence, and licensing numberless public houses; most of which are to be considered as so many academies for the acquiring and propagating the whole science of iniquity; and the landlord is generally an adept ready to instruct the ignorant. [12-13]

It is clear that if one allows an increased franchise within the body politic, if one courts the never-ending expansion of debt financing and capital profiteering, if one allows the fracturing of the public interest into different interests, thereby opening up the possibility of bargaining for the ownership of the public debt so that private individuals begin to uphold the public credit, then the final result must, of necessity, be unlicensed excess, an unruly inflationary discourse in which the private becomes the public, and the once harmonious organism of the state becomes a teeming cacophony of private interests competing with each other for a larger share of the public credit. As Elibank warns: 'The stock jobbers have the words *public faith* and *public credit* constantly in their mouths; and want to establish it as a maxim, That they are both engaged to support their monopoly, at the expence of the whole body of the people' [21].

Faith and credit, faith in credit is, of course, a necessity in a speculative society; here, however, the troping of the public interest into private profiteering is vividly accompanied through the image of the public credit residing in the mouth of the stock jobber. It is this private individualized body that speaks with the voice of public faith, and which must be defigured so that both it can be heard for what it is, the voice of private interest, and that the body of the people may be returned to the people.<sup>31</sup> It is clear then that the point of attack on this issue must be the metaphorical site of the body, which from Elibank's perspective comes down to a restructuring of the money/body metaphor in

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note that the most powerful voice of all, that of the King, opened Parliament in 1749 after the War of the Spanish Succession, during which the national debt had risen above £68 million, by asking the commons to 'be watchful to improve any opportunity of putting the national debt in a method of being reduced, with a strict regard to public faith and private property', cited in Dickson, *The Financial Revolution*, p. 231.

order to return the body to its primary physical semantic network. His comments about the organic nature of money can be seen in this light as one way of breaking the bond between money and the body:

Men not used to think of these subjects, talk of money like a vegetable, as if it were the nature of it to grow and increase. No doubt the particular man who lends it out at interest, feels himself grow richer; and perhaps the person who borrows it, may lay it out so as to bring in a return. But it must stop somewhere; and, considered in itself, it does not grow, but wears. [17]

Just as the public debt produces a difference in interests without end, so, it was argued, money must grow and increase. It is against this organism – here seen as a disruptive form – that Elibank phrases his comments. Money, he stresses, is material, it does not grow, but wears out: it is a fixed quantity which cannot be increased *ad infinitum*, so it follows that its figurative operations require adjustment, defusal. Money must be returned to its literal status, as coin, material and diverted from its use as trope, the generator of endless 'paper' money. The same defigurative strategy is exemplified by Elibank's comments about interest. The interest payable on the public debt is against the public interest: it represents the division of public credit, understood as the consent of the public to be governed, into a fractured plurality of private interests: private interest is not a flourishing organism, rather it is the virus within the public body. Where before the body of the individual became extended into the greater whole, the body politic, now the emphasis is on the defiguration of the public interest so that it cannot be identified with the body of the individual, private interests. Furthermore, the opportunities presented to those private interests for idleness cause moral degeneration in the entire body politic which is tantamount to the possible destruction of a constitution based on freewill and contractual consent. Where money had before been seen as the life-blood of the nation, the index to the state's prosperity, it now becomes the agent of disease and decay, and at all costs must be seen in terms of a fixed depreciating stock, not as organism but as distributable quantity that services the mechanism.

This lapse into idleness was remarked upon with great frequency during the period, so that its opposite virtue, industry, comes to bear an enormous weight in the argument. In relation to this money must increasingly be seen as a vice, the wages of idleness, and industry as the virtue productive of wealth.<sup>32</sup> A wealthy

<sup>32</sup> The religious overtones here point to a further discursive context in which these debates were held. Thomas Turner gives us a good example of the connection between these vices and the war, and the corresponding religious needs of a corrupt society. His diary entry for Friday 17 February 1758 reads: 'Oh, may religion once more rear up her head in this wicked and impious nation and triumph over vice and immorality! Then may we once more hope for success from our fleets and armies when our commanders shall be inspired with the love of God and his most holy religion. Then (and not till then) will all private interest and connection of Friends give way and become subordinate to the love of their King and country.' *Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765* (London, 1984), p. 137.



nation is a healthy one, and it achieves this through labour. Joseph Harris remarks:

... labour, skill, and industry, are the true sources of wealth; and the means of distributing it, in a due proportion, among all the members of the body politic. It is not any specific quantity of money, but the due distribution of it, that renders that body healthy and vigorous in all its parts. Idleness is the bane of society: the great source of vice and confusion: the fore-runner of public distress and calamity. Industry produces the contrary effects: and is to be promoted by all possible methods.<sup>33</sup>

Should this advice be followed the moral depravity of the nation will be avoided:

A Nation skilful in arts, abounding in products, untaunted in its morals; where public spirit prevails, above local and personal interests; and under a wise and righteous government, duly tempered, so as to be secure itself, and all under it secure: a nation, I say, under these circumstances, must needs within itself, be rich, flourishing and happy. [32]

The stakes being played for, then, are clear: they concern the balance of public and private interest. This last citation raises a number of issues which were articulated by the war with France that we have yet to examine: these issues can be seen in terms diametrically opposed to the figurations of the public and private body we have noted so far. For, while Eliphaz, writing before the war, may have set out to defigure the body, another set of writers during the war (and speaking from a different place within the social stratification, and therefore on behalf of different interests) attempted to effect as solid and cemented a connection between the individual and the public body, the body politic, as they could in order to produce 'a nation', a body 'above personal interests' served by a 'righteous government' for the good, health, and wealth of all.

#### THE BODY OF THE NATION

During wartime the pressure within discursive networks to produce an identity between the individual and state is, of course, extremely powerful. I do not wish to claim, however, that such identification occurred for the first time in England during the Seven Years War; rather, I want to examine how that identification was effected through the body as a metaphorical site, and how the discourse of debt, in its figuring of the body, enabled it.

If we return to our preliminary sketch of the monetary history of the first four decades of the century we may recall that the financial institutions, most especially the Bank of England, which functioned on behalf of the state, were essentially private companies working on behalf of public interests. During this period, then, the issue of 'interest', in both its senses, is continually under discussion. It is, however, during the war that the issue becomes most pressing.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Harris, *An Essay upon Money and Coins* (London, 1757), p. 31.

for very clear monetary reasons, and for more oblique, but more interesting, discursive reasons, and it is this discursive dimension which will occupy us in the comments below.

The crisis in the split of interests that we have seen remarked upon above was foreshadowed in the period leading up to the South Sea Bubble. Although for a short time after the collapse of the market profiteering was seen to be less attractive, this decrease in speculation is of minor importance when placed next to the institutional changes which resulted from the crash. For, in salvaging the infrastructure of the market in money and financial services threatened with ruin by the crisis a new conceptualization arose of the relationship between the state and its nascent capitalist institutions. This amounted to the realization that a greater identification between those institutions and the state was possible and desirable: the realization that private profit is sweeter if gained in the name of public service.

One of the most insistent forms of this identification occurs again through the use of the body as a site of metaphorical production, this time in relation to an institution that is precisely *incorporated* twice during the period, the Bank of England. In 1742 its charter, as we have already seen, was renewed giving it the power of exclusive banking on behalf of the government. That charter came up for renewal in 1764, directly after the conclusion of the war with France. It is not surprising, given the unprecedented rise in the national debt discussed above, that considerable pressure to justify its banking procedures was brought to bear on the bank and its supporters. Nor is it surprising that the charter was renewed, that the bank's body was saved, in a sense, and that the modes of discursive pressure at work to secure that corporation were directed towards producing the identification of the Bank of England with the fate and prosperity of the nation. This had in fact occurred in the years leading up to the war, and was to be merely reinforced during the conduct of it. However, the arguments for making a private corporation, owned by thirty-six individuals of considerable propertied means, identical to the public interest are worth careful attention.

John Hewitt, for example, writing in 1755 just before the war, states that the bank is founded upon the nation:

I may venture to say, that no *Bank* in the world is better secured than that of *England*, which having the whole Nation for its Foundation and Security, is safer than if the whole 9,000,000 £ were in Bullion and Specie.<sup>34</sup>

The chauvinist tenor of these comments is partly a function of the perceived threat from France, which, as we have seen was largely taken to run both its financial institutions and its government in less enlightened ways. Joseph Harris, for example, mounts the argument that a sound banking system can only rest on

<sup>34</sup> John Hewitt, *A Treatise upon Money, Coins, and Exchange, in regard to both theory and practice*. (London, 1755), p. 98.

a sound, i.e. free and contractual, political system by disingenuously referring to the history of banking in Venice:

These wise establishments [the banks] contributed greatly, towards stopping these baneful measures of adulterating the standards of money, that had been so frequently and so generally practised, in the dark preceding ages. The genius of trade breathes and requires a certain degree of security and freedom; and banks, such as we have been speaking of, can hardly ever take place under arbitrary governments.<sup>35</sup>

It is in relation to this monolithic ideology of commercialism that discussion of the debt and its alarming increase took place. This ideology generates an increasingly closer identification of the banking system with the constitutional principles of government held sacred to every Englishman, and with the freedom of the private individual to participate in the public interest – that which was controlled and administered by a national banking corporation. It is significant in this regard that the Bank of England suspended its payments of bills of exchange in 1758. These bills were precisely the representative pieces of paper signifying the individual's participation in the banking, or more generally the financial transactions, of the nation. A merchant quite literally 'wrote' his own money in the form of a private note declaring his indebtedness to another individual. Such personal or private credit, of course, bothers the national banking institution very little: it is only when this piece of paper is then exchanged for goods and services by signing it over to another individual that it becomes equivalent to legal tender – to coin. However in the last instance the Bank of England must endorse this piece of paper if it is to function as the equivalent of coin – or at least this possibility must exist. Such conversion from paper to coin in the last resort is only necessary when more than one institution or individual is allowed to issue promissory notes: if the issue becomes centralized in one institution the paper need never be converted into coin as long as the users of these means of transaction maintain their confidence in the issuing institution. It was because of the sudden lack of confidence in paper money that a run on the bank was initiated in 1758, which led to the bank suspending payment.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Harris, *An Essay upon Money and Coins*, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> John Francis, in his *History of the Bank of England* (London, 1847) comments on an earlier run on the bank during the 1745 rebellion: 'The bank pursued a different policy on that occasion: "The Chevalier Johnson, whose evidence was collected immediately after the battle of Culloden, says, that the Bank only escaped bankruptcy by a stratagem. Payment was not refused; but the Corporation retained its specie by employing agents to enter with notes, who, to gain time, were paid in sixpences; and as those who came first were entitled to priority of payment, the agents went out at one door with the specie they had received, and brought it back by another, so that the bona fide holders of notes could never get near enough to present them." "By this artifice," says the Chevalier, somewhat quaintly, "the Bank preserved its credit, and literally faced its creditors..." p. 161.

The arguments for centralizing the issuing authority are clear if it is deemed necessary to move from coin to paper. But if not, the relationship between the paper currency circulating in the economy and the coin that sustains it needs to be examined. This is precisely the topic for the tract entitled *Thoughts on money, circulation, and paper currency* published in 1758, which puts the matter thus:

Bank Bills, and all Credit, are to Money, what Money is to other Commodities.

The Value of the Bills consist in the power they give of receiving the Money they express, and presuppose the Money to be deposited. The value of Money consists in the power of purchasing Commodities.<sup>37</sup>

Bills and credit must be based on money, which, it is suggested, is a commodity – 'money to other commodities' – deriving its power from its use in the purchase of other commodities. On account of this, money, according to this author, must be fixed as a commodity, as a precise and quantifiable weight of either gold or silver: a pound sterling 'really weighed twelve ounces' at one time, he bemoans, and then goes on to outline the folly of attempting to make more coins from the same amount of silver. The manifest aim of this discussion is to legislate and control the amount of money in the economy, from which follows the insistence on the founding link between coin and metal, credit and coin. The problem it addresses is the unlicensed and unruly increase in paper money which threatens to destroy these links, and its task, therefore, is to bring money to law, to control the excess.

As we have seen in the discussion of aesthetics, the importation of an adjacent legislating discourse represents one of the ways in which a discursive excess may be controlled. Here it is the bounds of correct sexuality and proper manners that are invoked as the discursive police:

The trite maxim, That money makes money, is true in a Nation as well as in a private Man; it enables a people to add to their real, permanent and natural wealth: There must be more employment where there is more circulation . . . This no body will dispute to be real wealth, tho' it may be said, that the money which has the occasion of bringing it about, was only imaginary.

It is a condition annexed to every thing here below. That the *abuse* of it does mischief in a greater degree, than the *good use* of it can be of benefit. This is the case of money; and as it tends to effeminacy and corruption of manners, it still makes way for MACHIAVELL'S wheel.<sup>38</sup>

But a second, and equally important, strategy is to sever the links between paper currency and public debt, as Elilbank outlines:

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Murray, *Thoughts on money, circulation, and paper currency* (Edinburgh, 1758), p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21. This point is made most forcefully by John Brown in his *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757): '... vast wealth naturally produces Avarice, Luxury, or Effeminacy...' p. 154.

They are highly mistaken who would confound the Public Debts with Paper Currency; one might with equal propriety consider Mortgages on private estates as such.

FRANCE owes an enormous debt, and yet admits of no Paper Currency; and 'tis even a question if their Government is capable of it.

By Paper Currency can only be meant, such Bank or Bankers Bills, as carry along with them a certainty that the money they express is actually deposited, and can be received on demand. Wherever there is the smallest doubt or difficulty of receiving payment, they will not be accepted of as money. This cannot be said of the Public Debts, which are liable to fluctuate, and where no man can make a demand of his money; but if he wants to convert them into Cash, he must look out for a purchaser. On the contrary nothing threatens our Paper Currency so much, as the increase of the Public Debt. The Dividends drawn by Foreigners diminish the quantity of *Specie*, and there must ever be a proportion between that and the Paper it gives currency to. [32-3]

The problem here is that private debt, that written on a piece of paper, may all too easily be equated with the public debt, that incurred by the government to the individuals who lend it money. It had not gone unremarked, however, that the rapid increase of paper money clearly accompanied the increase in the public debt.

Furthermore, the connections between paper money – private debt – and the public debt are more insidious, since it became increasingly obvious that many private individuals took the occasion of the war to profiteer. So it was that Exchange Alley, the place where the hated stock jobbers and brokers hung out, became synonymous with vice and indolence. Nothing but paper currency blew in the wind there, and as its circulation increased it became more and more obvious that the public debt was really identical to private profit: the stock jobbers had been given a licence literally to print money. It is in this light that we should note the above insistence on the non-equation of the public debt with paper currency, for this served to give credit to the banking institutions that funded paper currency. In other words it should be seen as an attempt to wrest private profit from paper credit, and to equate paper money with public morality founded upon public faith in the banking system: all this in the service of the identification of private credit with public credit, the individual of good standing with a healthy upstanding image of the nation. This is not so much fantasy identification as phantasmic, in a sense which will become productive for the last chapter of this book.

It is not surprising, then, that the rapid increase in paper money came to be described in similar terms to those employed by Elibank in his representation of the virus money at work in the organism of the body politic. Where Elibank was at pains to halt the erosion of landed property against the monied, writers during the war were more concerned with defacement and erosion of the nation, as a discursive counter, through the circulation of paper credit. Thus a tract of 1760 claims

... when paper-credit gets into the hands of men of power, who think themselves as much above honesty, as they are above the mechanic part, this paper-credit becomes a most

dangerous instrument of destruction to the whole community. All monopolies are dangerous to trade; but a money monopoly will sap the foundation of the best formed constitution that ever was established.<sup>39</sup>

In order to arrest this decline it was necessary to forge links between the public debt – the money required by government to pursue the war – and public credit in the sense of confidence and participation in the ideological construct of the nation. Should this be effective every individual takes on a measure of responsibility for the nation's debt, which becomes a public property, and in so doing public debt leads to public profit. As the same pamphlet points out: 'while there is such a premium given in England, as has been given during this war, and stocks continue low, many changers will venture their necks, by sacrificing the public to their private profit' [14-15].

This position was not without its detractors, of course, for a large number of people were very happy making private profit. Thus another writer claims in a letter from Dublin that precisely the opposite is the case, and the greater the debt the greater the national and individual prosperity:

The seeming PARADOX, but actual TRUTH, that, a prudent Man, or a wise Nation may grow rich by running in Debt, was never so clearly demonstrated, so fully verified, or so eminently successful, as in the Case of the People of Great-Britain.<sup>40</sup>

The same letter goes on to explain that as England became more indebted it 'rose higher and higher in Wealth, Power, and Credit' [12]. However, the vast majority of tracts and treatises after 1760 are obsessively concerned with the reduction of the debt, or the interest payable on it.<sup>41</sup>

It is in the light of these issues that the creation of a national bank became a topic of real concern. If such an institution were created it would, almost by its institutionalization, connect paper money to the public interest, and would legislate for the bank's profiteering on behalf of the nation. In this way public debt would produce public profit, and the moral degeneration brought about, firstly to the individual who may become bankrupt through dealing in money, and secondly to the state which is made up of such individuals, would cease:

Whoever examines the causes of the number of bankruptcies which have happened of late to our merchants, will find, that most of them have proceeded from trafficking in Change-Alley, where thousands have been transacted, for every hundred on the Royal Exchange.

<sup>39</sup> *Paper-credit considered* (Dublin?, 1760), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> *A Proposal for the Restoration of Public Wealth and Credit, in a Letter* (Dublin, 1760), p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> But cf. Owen Ruffhead, *Considerations on the present dangerous Crisis* (London, 1763), p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> This kingdom seems to be as much in danger from national discord, as from the national debt: And we can never hope to be relieved from the burthen of the latter, or from any other oppression, till we are freed from the grievance of the former.

This baneful traffick, the offspring of public debt, has been nourished by the distresses of the nation; and as further increase of the public debt and stock-jobbing may be fatal to our credit and commerce, the following measures are proposed, as a remedy for such growing evils.<sup>42</sup>

The anthropomorphic tenor of the comment is once again present, determining the employment of metaphors of offspring, disease and cure. In this instance the creation of a national bank is put forward as the remedy for the disease within the public body. If the nation is sick, bled by the profiteers, who become sick themselves as their attempts to grow fat and rich fail, then the transfer of the disease from the organism of the state back to the individual suggests a complex working of the metaphorical substitutions surrounding the body, in which various figurations and defigurations coalesce in order to create a homology between the body of the state – defigured so that it becomes literally a body subject to the curative powers of medicine – and the bodies of those individual subjects who are represented by or within its signature.

Thus an analysis of the figural dimensions of this argument reveals that the remedy, the creation of a national bank, is nothing less than a defiguration of the body in its public sense, and a refiguration of the private body into the public corporation. This defiguration/refiguration results in the revaluation of the private individual through his participation in the collective representation that is the new corporate nation. This troping could be said to be a founding gesture of the capitalist description of the subject in which each individual has access to and is represented in the state through the corporation of his/her own body. Such a revision to the figuration of the body cannot be said to have been a simple matter, nor can it be located at a specific point in time. Rather, we are tracing the interlocking movements which characterize and surround this defigurative strategy in such a way as to isolate particular instances where the troping referred to above becomes a possibility. Something of the complexities involved in making this analysis more precise can be glimpsed in the discursive shifts at work in the tract entitled *A Proposal for selling part of the forest lands and chaces, and disposing of the produce towards the discharge of that part of the national debt, due to the Bank of England; and for the establishment of a national bank* which claims, along with many other tracts, that the private exploitation of the public has gone far enough, and that the only real measure that had been effective in arresting this decline was the Bank of England's decision to stop discounting bills of exchange. Although the Bank is referred to in laudatory terms, the author is also aware of the dangers involved in placing all one's trust in a private bank. Hence, he notes:

... the extraordinary Influence this Body [the Bank of England] has acquired, both with respect to the Funds, and the commercial Credit of the Kingdom; and also, how far the

<sup>42</sup> *An Essay on the Means of Discharging the Public Debt* (London, 1763), p. vii.

Safety, or Welfare of either, may at any time be endangered by it, are Matters of such Consequence, as may well deserve the serious Consideration of the Legislature.<sup>43</sup>

The body here is a collective noun, referring to the 'body of men' constituting the directors of the Bank of England, but its important work is to suggest that the institution, like the body of any other individual, should have no more power over the kingdom than anyone else; it should behave precisely as any subject might within the confines of the constitution of Great Britain. The problem with the Bank of England is that it is but one more 'body', one more individual and not the true representative of the people, it is precisely *not* a National Bank. Such an institution would return the 'body' of the bank to the thirty-six individuals who held stock in the company – it would re-energize the literal use of the term 'body' in its insistence on pointing to the individuals who owned the bank – while at the same time it would create, through the institutionalization of the nation, a body which was abstracted from any one individual, or group of individuals: it would incorporate an institution in such a fashion as to embody the subject in the state. The citation continues:

Our Constitution leaves every Individual the free Choice, either of advancing Money to the Government, or refusing to do so, when the Terms are not agreeable to the Lender. Every particular Compulsion in this Point, wou'd, with great Reason, be deem'd an Invasion of the Property of the Subject; and yet it wou'd certainly be a national Benefit, to have the Credit of the Government established on such a Foundation, as may not leave it in the Power of any Body of Men, to obtrude their own Terms for advancing Money on the current Supplies, which can come in but by degrees; and yet, on particular Occasions, may be immediately necessary to the Safety of the State. [16]

State and individual are connected through the free-will and consent expressed by the subject to be governed – we have noted this earlier. However, the argument here becomes more complex through the combination of the two terms 'property' and 'subject', for at one level the text is clearly arguing that the individual should not be put upon to lend the government money – his property is precisely his own to do with as he wishes – whereas at another it is suggesting that the subject itself would be 'invaded' were it to be so coerced. It is this relation between the subject as autonomous agent and the subject as property that determines the constitution of the state, and which should be based on 'free-will and choice' in so far as one owns one's own subjectivity. In the passage to hand we should note that there is more than one figuration for the body and the subject: the 'body of men' is perceived to be obstructive to the well-being of the state, while the right to capitalize on one's property is taken to be the mark of the subject, which is also, as body, perceived as a property. The need for a national

<sup>43</sup> J. Perceval, *A Proposal for selling part of the forest lands and chaces, and disposing of the produce towards the discharge of that part of the national debt, due to the Bank of England; and for the establishment of a national bank* (London, 1763), p. 16.

bank, a body whose legitimating property is the nation, is answered by an institution whose various dealings and functions are perceived to be on behalf of both its own polyvalent subjectivity, and of the subjects who make up the nation. The national bank, as a body, then, is both a property and a property owner, both a corporation and a subject.

We are following through here a complex set of figurations surrounding the site of the body which are marshalled in order to effect a unification of the subject, or individual, with the nation; this might be called the incorporation of the nation. We could also describe these defigurations and refigurations in terms of the 'discharge' of the debt, another topic for obsessive concern during these years. The first, and most obvious use of the term 'discharge' is in relation to a moral imperative: one ought to 'discharge' one's duty. Hence, to 'discharge the national debt' is in some sense to discharge one's duty or obligation to the nation. A second sense, and the one I shall be more interested in, concerns the production of a surplus, or excess. 'Discharge' in this sense necessarily entails a further controlling or legislative function in its surrounding discursive milieu: to countenance an excessive discharge without the means of restricting and policing it would be to court an unruly excess, and the possible breakdown of the ordering of discourses.

These more general comments on the discursive excess can be linked to the tracts on the establishment of a national bank by noting that the excess of private profit would be controlled, if not eradicated were a national bank the only 'body' allowed to deal in money, and the only corporation represented by and for the body of the nation. Furthermore, given that the principles of banking dictate that money produces further money, that there is an element of excessive production inherent to banking, such a surplus could be legislated and controlled much more easily were the institution conducting this business public, and accountable to government, rather than private, and accountable to the corporate codes of conduct decided upon by the body of men who own the bank.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, the institution of the bank soaks up or cushions the effects of excess; it generates credit in the economy within limits which can be laid down by government: it allows a degree of excessive productivity to money just as government allows a degree of freedom to the individual. This limitation is often argued for in the same breath as extolling the virtues of the British constitution and its basis in the free-born Englishman: indeed, it was argued that the existence of the public debt represented the highest form of this system in operation, since a large amount of debt expresses a widespread and weighty assent to government; it is synonymous with the expression of confidence in government.

<sup>44</sup> At the end of the century Sir Francis Baring outlined some of these issues in his *Observations on the Establishment of the Bank of England, and on the Paper Circulation of the Country* (London, 1797).

In 1764 the charter of the Bank of England was renewed, thus establishing it without competitor as the primary financial institution in the land. Although it was not a national bank, in the sense of a government-run office, it clearly functioned *in name* as a national institution. The Seven Years War, and the debates conducted through it about the financing of the debt, had firmly established the connections between money and state, the individual and the state, and public and private credit so that a public nationalized banking system had become unnecessary.

The results of these debates, which I am referring to as the incorporation of the nation, were enabled by this figurative work around the body. It is the redescription of the body of the nation which enables us to locate a large-scale change in the relationships between individuals and the state. If that change was not solely effected through the debates surrounding the debt they certainly contributed to it.<sup>45</sup>

#### THE DISCOURSE OF DEBT

If the body is both defigured and refigured during the Seven Years War in the ways I have suggested, then the position of the subject in relation to the body must also be examined. Discussion of this takes up Part II of the present book; however, it is relevant at this point to include some preparatory remarks about that positioning, and to point towards the conclusion of this chapter. I will argue in later chapters that the subject becomes increasingly seen as an excess or surplus in relation to the body. It is the connections between such an excess and the surplus discussed by tracts on the national debt which will be investigated in the remainder of this chapter.

<sup>45</sup> It would be foolish to maintain that this extremely significant change was only the product of the discourses on the debt. The theoretical and political issues raised by this question were debated in the wider context of government and constitution, and predate the Seven Years War by nearly a hundred years. For a good discussion of the seventeenth-century debate see Corrine Conistock Weston and Janelle Renfrow Greenberd, *Subjects and Sovereigns: The Grand Controversy over Legal Sovereignty in Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1981), and for the wider context within which those debates were placed J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975). The eighteenth-century context seen from the perspective of the continuing pressure exerted by the church on these debates is discussed at length in J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985). It should also be pointed out that these relationships between government, individual and state have been traditionally discussed from the more restricted perspective of high politics, in which the distribution of ideologies informing Whig and Tory politics take centre stage. Recent work on this topic has sought to revise considerably the notion that a Whig hegemony prevailed during the period under discussion; see notably John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976); J. C. D. Clark, *The Dynamics of Change* (Cambridge, 1982); J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985); and Linda Colley, *In Defence of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60* (Cambridge, 1982).

We may begin with *Characteristics of the present political state of Great Britain*, published in 1763, in which we find the familiar argument rehearsed about the beneficial effects of public over private banks, along with comments concerning the differences between the French system of debt finance and the British. The British system of circulating paper currency is found, of course, to be superior. At the point in the tract where this is stated the author interrupts his discourse in order to explain one of the foundational principles of banking: the production of excess *within limits*:

If at any period, the coin in any kingdom is eighteen millions, this nation may carry on a considerable trade, and in time may acquire twelve millions more in silver and gold without paper-credit. But if, at the time at which they have only eighteen millions in coin, the nation should fall into the use of paper-credit, and should circulate a sum of twelve millions in Paper-money, in order to quicken industry, and to enable the people to carry on a more extensive trade: it is evident, they may carry on a greater trade with *thirty* millions of *paper and coin*, than with eighteen millions of *coin alone*.<sup>46</sup>

The Svengali act of banking must have always seemed so miraculous: from ten coins one produces, as if by magic, paper worth another eight. This printing of money, however, cannot go beyond certain bounds: the activities of the bank should proceed 'under proper regulations . . . established by proper authority' [28]. The one major obstacle to this, as this author admits, lies in specifying precise quantifiable limits:

It is not easy to assign limits, or to determine, how far a nation may go in borrowing. Neither, indeed, would it be good policy. It is much better to keep far on the safe side, and never to *stretch* the public credit. But certainly, the limits for such a rich commercial nation as Britain, extend further than many have imagined. Dr Davenant, in the end of the last century, when the public debts were about fourteen millions, was positive, that, if they were suffered to rise higher, nay, if they were not gradually cleared, England would be undone. Yet we have seen them rise to thrice that sum, while the nation is become richer than it was before.

However, there must certainly be a limit: No nation can contract debts without end. Public debts may be too high. One may be authorized to say, the debts of Britain are *high enough* at present; since the legislature appears evidently to be of this opinion, and seems anxious to have it reduced. [50–1]

Here 'public credit' refers not only to the actual amount of debt but also to the confidence of the public in the monetary system. The limiter on the possibility of infinite expansion is, in this way, internal to that which generates the expansion. That we should understand 'never to stretch the public credit' in this sense is made evident in the concluding arguments of this tract:

When a free government is able to contract great debts by borrowing from its own subjects, this is a certain sign, that it has gained *the confidence* of the people. If foreigners

<sup>46</sup> Robert Wallace, *Characteristics of the present political state of Great Britain* (London, 1758), pp. 25–6.

are eager to have a share of its funds, this shews confidence of the *neighbouring nations*. If it be true that the people of Britain have entrusted the government with more than sixty millions, and foreigners with more than twenty, such a government must have a *firm credit*. [53]

Once this secondary semantic possibility is brought to the fore a further question arises concerning the control of public credit in the secondary sense. What might happen if the public confidence should become excessive?

This question is intimately related to issues of government and its sustaining system of accountability – to its representability of the people it governs – and will not be answered adequately through reference solely to tracts on the debt. We do find in these tracts, however, discussion of the relationship between public confidence in paper money and in the government which initiates the debt in ways which are adjacent to the larger questions concerning consent and government. The author of *An Essay on Paper Circulation: and a Scheme proposed for supplying the Government with Twenty Millions without any loan or New Tax* begins, for example, by arguing that the public debt must be the common property of all individuals, since no one individual has enough private funds to cover it. Because of this, confidence in the legislature must be upheld in order to keep the entire economy from collapsing. Then the following point is made:

The meaning of the words *Public Credit* being generally misunderstood, made the people be more easily misled into the false opinion, that the security of the credit of the State depended upon the good will and ready assistance of the monied men. Nothing is more common than to hear, in places of public resort, expressions to the following purpose, *Public Credit flourishes, Public Credit is low, Public Credit is in danger*; and if the generality of people should be asked the meaning of those phrases, they would immediately reply, that they refer to the state of the funds; for when they are low priced, Public Credit is low, and when they are high priced, it flourishes.<sup>47</sup>

An interesting turn is carried out here, from the insistence on 'public credit' as referring to the individual's confidence in the government or the bank – precisely the work of the anthropomorphism used in the description of the 'public credit' – to the institution's faith in its responsibility to the individuals it governs. This turning, which we might properly call a troping, is extremely interesting since it relies upon a prior identification of the individual with the state in order for the state, taken as a collective individual or corporation, to return its responsibility to those private individuals who are represented by government. Thus, where writers had argued throughout the war for a general responsibility to be taken by each individual for the debt, now, at the close of the war the nation is the individual, and as such it should take care to carry out its responsibility as an individual:

<sup>47</sup> *An Essay on Paper Circulation: and a Scheme proposed for supplying the Government with Twenty Millions without any loan or New Tax* (London, 1764), pp. 9–10.

The real foundation of Public Credit rests upon the good faith of the Parliament, joined to the probability of their being able to fulfil their contracts. Public Credit, therefore . . . must ever remain firm and unshaken, while the majority of the Legislature continue honest, and do not borrow beyond what the value of the fund pledged for repayment can bear. It is then evident that Public Credit may flourish independent of the monied men, may even in their despite: [10]

The model individual in the state is the state itself; as long as the government remains honest and continues to operate according to the dictates of good housekeeping, its responsibilities on behalf of and in respect to the private interests within the state are perceived to be discharged. Hence, its raising of money through loans is to be taken as an index to its correct discharge of these responsibilities. This, we might remark, is as present to our own contemporaneity as it is to the civic humanist tradition we are describing in its attempts to take account of the new commercialism, and to rearticulate its positionalities in respect to a changing discursive network becoming increasingly aligned with capitalist ideologies of the subject and state.

This repositioning involves, by necessity, a reevaluation of the moral economy as the individual is figured both within the corporation of the state and as a subject under its government. Consequently the moral economy of individualism is attenuated by the figurations produced under a capitalist description of the state as subject. The trick and problem is to place the individual under the sign of the subject — we are witnessing the beginnings of such a process here — in order to maintain the fiction of a benevolent collective capitalism which is, nevertheless, able and willing to punish, both morally and legally, its most successful and individualistic, not to say selfish, capitalist entrepreneurs: the monied interests. Because of this the state *must* represent the best possibility and opportunities not only for the subject but also for the representation of subjectivity; the state *must* function as the model citizen in both its economic and ethical interests in order to convince the private individual of, and maintain his conviction in, the collective capital enterprise that is the incorporation of the nation.

Consequently, the repositioning of the moral economy takes into account both the fact that bankruptcies occur in the individualistic pursuit of profit, and that society becomes corrupt through the degeneration of morals brought about by selfish profiteering. In this way it mortgages the health and well-being of the individual to the greater ideal of perpetuity: the state comes to be seen as the means for effecting the continuation of the species, taking on the role of genealogy and becoming the image of the historical.<sup>48</sup> It follows from this that great pressure must be placed on the conjunction between the individual and the

<sup>48</sup> Much could be said here about the role of history in this figurative account of the nation; it is far from coincidental that many 'histories' of England were produced during the period under discussion.

state, between public interest and private gain, in order to create the discourse within which its revalued ethics of collective individualism can be read as an ethics, not as the more brutal vicissitudes of economic pragmatism. Once the war has been concluded, then, the need to construct a sustaining culture for this ethics of state individualism is great, since

The mischievous practices of the monied men, however, are far from ending with the war. Even in time of peace, they assume not only the coinage, but the sole direction of the circulation of all our paper money, which is a power too great to be left in the hands of private men, who are every day extending it more and more, to the great prejudice of the State. [39–40]

This production of the body of the state should be seen in terms of the legislation and control of a discursive excess, for it is clear that all the tracts discussed in this chapter are concerned not only with the excess in monetary terms, but also with their own discursive power. Thus, while these tracts work out various positions in regard to the management of debt we can also visualize that debt as, in some sense, a product of the discourse about it. The greater the awareness of the productivity of the circulation of paper money the greater the incentive to participate in the capitalist exchange of interests; the debt, then, can be seen as itself the result of those discourses on exchange and control, as itself the discursive excess, or name given to that surplus thrown up by description and analysis. It is because of this that the need for a controlling legislative external discourse is paramount. This explains in good measure why we have noted such an insistent pressure around the site of the body: the pressure to make the individual identify with the state. For if that takes place public credit is personalized, thereby forcing the individual to continue to uphold his faith in government in order to maintain his own solvency. The result of this identification, as we have seen, is to remove the licence to print money from the individual body to the collective, thereby controlling the excess through the defiguration and refiguration of the body outlined above.

Part of this pressure focused on the creation of a body, or corporation, which could regulate the financial markets of the nation, and on the creation, therefore, of a national bank. In this way the excess, or profit accruing from the trade in money, would be contained within the national institution: public debt would lead to public profit. Now we may begin to see these manoeuvres less as a part of the reality of economics, than as a problem of and for representation. Accordingly, one way of approaching these debates is to see them as working out a way of representing public debt within the bounds of control, as a proper figure, as opposed to a licentious, uncontrolled and improper trope: as a regulated quantity within the economy, not as an excessive one. In this sense the debates about the national bank are concerned fundamentally with the creation of a space of representation in which the debt could be represented as debt, not as excess. This, it should be pointed out, is precisely the same order of problem

encountered in aesthetic theory in which the space of representation for the subject is refigured in order to represent subjectivity under the sign of the subject and not as an excluded excess. That excess is just as much a product of the discourse of analysis and description as a real quantity within the world; it is just as much an unwanted leakage from the legislative discourse on debt control as the unwanted sign of private profiteering. We are now in a position to see how it is within the register of representation that the problem arises: how can a discursive excess be represented and contained; how can that discourse of representation contain itself, and refrain from producing its own excess?

One might remark that these problems are equally pressing for any and all discourses of analysis and description, for what is being examined is the extent to which a legislative discourse is self-regulating, proper to itself. In relation to the discourse of debt these questions have a certain critical pay-off in the real of economics, since the ability to control the excess produced by the discursive analytic has effects which are felt in more than discursive ways. It is this extra performative aspect of the discourse of debt, its penetration within the real of monetary transactions, which causes a certain amount of self-anxiety about its efficacy, and hence the high incidence of comments such as the following:

Our national debt, or the sums borrowed by our government, is a meer imaginary treasure, every body knows, now no where existing, unless in some little, foolish scraps of paper only: for all the money in the kingdom would go but a very short way to discharge it.<sup>49</sup>

The 'real' is not penetrated by the 'imaginary' paper sum of the debt, nor is it required that the imaginary sum ever be transferred into the realm of the real, for should such a thing happen the nation would be revealed to be bankrupt. The noteworthy aspect of this strategy is the necessity for a hierarchization of discourses, into a real and an imaginary, required in order to prevent the latter leaking into the former. It is not only necessary to construct a hierarchy, however, but also to erect an effective boundary between the two. This work can be seen most profitably in terms of a reordering of discourses in which the real and imaginary sums present to the economy are represented within discrete and mutually exclusive discursive domains, and by the very fact of this reordering the power of representation itself increases. For, if it becomes possible to represent within the economy an imaginary sum of money which is tangible enough to make and mar fortunes, but which in monetary value is beyond the entire wealth of the nation, then the bounds of representation have changed. Taken out of its economic context, which must be done in order to register the full implications of this argument, it suggests that something within a closed discourse can be produced which cannot be contained within it: a discourse somehow manages to represent something which may not only be the very thing

<sup>49</sup> *Remarks on the present state of the national debt* (London, 1764), p. 2.

presumed to have been impossible and beyond the limits of its representative powers, but also may be precisely that which implies the breakdown or destruction of its own discursivity and of its power to representation. The excess is not only produced by the discourse of analysis, it is also represented within it. At this most general level the paradox upon which we have stumbled may seem insignificant; it may be argued that all discourses, to some extent, produce and represent their 'impossibility', their 'others'. Without wishing to deny or affirm these general comments, we can trace the eighteenth-century concern and anxiety over the possibility of this paradox.

This anxiety can be located very easily in relation to the actual increase of the national debt during the Seven Years War: an anxiety which, as I have been at pains to demonstrate also had effects at the discursive level. The questions that were raised were, in the most simplistic terms, concerned with the problem of dealing with a sum which was perceived, either necessarily or not, as 'unreal', or at least non-transferable into the 'real' of gold and silver. I have argued above that once we address this topic of concern it becomes apparent very quickly that the 'real' topic was less the imaginary sum of the debt than how that sum might be represented, and more importantly controlled. A good example of the eighteenth-century awareness of this problem, and of its complexities is provided by the author of *An Easy Method of discharging the National Debt*, published in 1763:

The 140 millions of the public Funds are only *nominal* Wealth: the *real* is gone and spent: but they are a *real* Debt and heavy Mortgage, both upon the Landed and Personal Property of the Nation: and to reduce the Interest that is payable upon it, does not seem to promise much national Advantage: Honourably to discharge the Debt would be a *real Good*, and if possible to be done, seems to be a Measure absolutely necessary.<sup>50</sup>

This is far from playing with rhetorical forms: the repeated stress on 'real' points out the full importance attached to working this problem out within the dominant forms of discursive control, those associated with 'honour' and 'national advantage'. In the first use 'real' refers to a physical entity – coin, or money which represents wealth. In the second it is used metaphorically to refer to the reality of a quantity, not a thing, but a paper sum. This sum, the debt, is real enough: it saps the strength of the entire nation, but its claims to 'the real' are slightly different from the first case, where the distinction between paper money, 'nominal wealth', and silver coin, 'real wealth', is made in order to ground the 'real' in the land. In the last use the word comes to take on moral overtones – it would be a 'real good', one that would be both 'real' in the second sense, but also real in the first, that is tangible, if it is taken in terms of the moral value such an action would have.

Whether or not the debt is 'real' then, in any sense, is of less immediate

<sup>50</sup> *An Easy Method* (London, 1763), p. 34–5.



importance than the 'stylistic' question – in itself never a mere question of style – which must be decided by writers on the National Debt: which set of figural terms should be activated in the description of this paper quantity. That this question is fundamentally embedded within the problematic of the languages of representation should by now require no further elaboration. Whether the discursive network during the war was debilitated by its inability to represent the debt or not is a question we must leave open, but the result of the discursive work we have been following can be described with certainty as the defusal of the debt's destabilizing power, and as the production of a more subtle description of the relations between the 'real' and 'imaginary' of monetary transactions. Thus, Richard Price writing in 1778 has no trouble at all reconciling money and credit, or the real and the imaginary, which he performs in the following manner:

The whole specie of the kingdom, therefore, is probably at this time about fifteen millions. Of this some million must be hoarded at the *Bank* – Our circulating *specie*, therefore, appears to be decreased. But our wealth, or the quantity of money in the kingdom, is greatly increased. This is paper to a vast amount, issued in almost every corner of the kingdom; and particularly by the BANK OF ENGLAND. While this paper maintains its credit it answers all the purposes of specie, and is in all respects the same as money. Specie represents some real value in goods and commodities. On the contrary: paper represents immediately nothing but specie. It is a promise or obligation which the emitter brings himself under to pay a given sum in coin; and it owes its currency to the credit of the emitter; or to an opinion that he is able to make good his engagement; and that the sum specified may be received upon being demanded. – Paper, therefore, represents coin; and coin represents real value. That is, the one is a *sign* of wealth. The other is the *sign* of that *sign*. – But farther: Coin is an *universal* sign of wealth, and will procure it every where. It will bear any alarm, and stand any shock. – On the contrary: Paper, owing its currency to opinion, has only a local and imaginary value. It can stand no shock.<sup>51</sup>

For Price the doubled nature of representation has almost become a fact of life: signs can and do produce further signs, and the need to authenticate any one sign within its founding origin has long since passed. The ramifications which this has within the domain of the individual's relation to the state and government cannot be explored here, but we can see, I think, without a great deal of explanatory work being required, how the excess has become neutralized. The discourse of debt has, in our terms, become a part of the wider network of discourses, productive of further figurative forms yet contained within the full array of the discursive network. The excess produced by the debt crisis had become a way of life too, for the national debt was to become an ever-increasing sum, requiring continual work of accommodation and neutralization. However, one further means of exorcising the ghost of the unlicensed increase of the excess needs to be investigated before leaving the topic.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Price, *Two Tracts on Civil Liberty* (London, 1778), pp. 74–5.

We may recall that from the very beginning of the war with France opinion in England recognized that the hostilities were provoked, if not produced, by concerns over the respective monetary systems in France and in England, and over their abilities to sustain large amounts of borrowing. As we have already seen one of the problems with the war, right from the start, concerned its eventual end, since a monetary war almost required perpetual hostilities. The debates about the conclusion of the war therefore take on crucial significance, and provide us with the final turn to the figurations of the discursive excess.

#### THE END TO EXCESS

Concern about the end of the war was determined both by England's fortunes in specific military encounters and by the fluctuating opinions about the size of, and ability to repay, the debt. When peace became a possibility the number of tracts published arguing either for or against particular peace proposals was very substantial. One such comment is of particular interest, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in January 1761. It begins in the following manner:

Excess in politicks is as fatal to a state as intemperance to the animal constitution. The one deprives us of the blessings of health and long life, the other exhausts our strength, and deprives us of the blessings of a glorious peace. This error in the statesmen may arise from two different causes. They may be either too much attached to measures for carrying on a war, which shall lead them into an expence more than necessary for their country's interest, and more than she can possibly bear, or too precipitate, or descending, too tedious, or inexorable in their negotiations for peace; which shall overlook the main object of the war; or hazard more in its prosecution than any indifferent point left in debate can recompense, should it, at last, be obtained with much treasure and bloodshed.<sup>52</sup>

The constellation of terms should by now be more than familiar, as should the complexities aroused by their use. The author of this article goes on to express concern about the possible end to the war, which, it is claimed, has been carried on with a vast expence, and continues rather with an increase, than any appearance of a deliverance from that burthen, which is annually brought upon us by new supplies'. Furthermore, the author contends:

A peace has been offered, and some overtures are said to have been transmitted by the enemy for putting an end to the war, and for preventing the like disturbances amongst the nation for the future; and yet the prodigious armaments and the naval preparations now in hand, give us little hopes of a near approach of peace; they rather discover a determined resolution to harken to no conditions but such as a conqueror has a right, by the law of arms, to exact. [10]

<sup>52</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1761, vol. XXXI, p. 10.

The sentiment is timely, for the stock-piling of armaments leads necessarily and irrevocably to their eventual use. In this case the author appeals to the wisdom and good sense of the minister conducting the affairs of the nation, William Pitt.

It is of considerable significance that Pitt's character was almost universally taken to be the embodiment of the patriot, the Great Commoner who held his principles above party or personal interest. He represented the private individual who most reflected public interest: his person was not only tied up with and immersed in the welfare of the nation, it was significantly the product of a will to personality on the part of the nation.<sup>53</sup> It was precisely Pitt's position in regard to the general will, his position above private interest that dazzled and intrigued his contemporaries. That position, I would argue, was not solely of his making, but a product of the discourse of debt. Seen in this light Pitt's patriotism is the necessary legislating principle required to control the excess.

This point is made by the article under discussion, when the author, having outlined the two possibilities facing 'the minister',<sup>54</sup> one to continue the war and risk 'eclipsing the glory, and encroaching upon the property of his king and country', and the other to sue for peace 'as would be sufficient to guarantee that acquisition to the crown of *Great Britain*, and to put it out of the power of *France* to disturb the peace of the *British* dominions any more', asks 'What more should be done?' to which the following reply is given: 'He should persevere, and never desist till the excess shall be corrected, or till the aid granted by *Great Britain* to her allies, does not exceed the bounds of her own interest.' It is Pitt, the patriot minister who can speak in the interests of the nation, and who can call a halt to the excess of the war. His ability to function in this way is demanded by the discourse of debt, and his role as the voice of the nation, the voice of liberty, is required by the incorporation of the nation. The end to excess is, in this manner, spoken and willed by the excess itself: the new nation speaks through its exemplary figure. The extent to which this figure is manifested through and in the personality of Pitt will be discussed in Part II of this book.

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## PART II

<sup>53</sup> John Brewer discusses Pitt's patriotism, and the difficulties into which it thrust him during his later political career. See *Party Ideology*, pp. 96–111.

<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that Pitt's name is not used, nor is felt to be required.

## 5 The Voice of Liberty

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A voice sounds out across the nation, a voice of the nation sounds out across the waves, a voice so sublime, so powerful it causes distant thrones to shudder. This voice is the voice of Pitt, the patriot minister whose reputation so crushed his opponents, and went so far in front of him that the real voice, the real William Pitt had trouble keeping up with the public persona.

No other voice has such power during the eighteenth century, no other voice speaks with the equivalent power: it was a voice sublime, a voice which echoed the awful still voice that was the subject of so much debate about sublimity. Furthermore, no other voice speaks so much out of itself, out of its own voice, for it is a public manifestation of a public will: the will to power of the English voice. We shall see how the elocutionary movement taps this will to power, and how it utilizes the myth of Pitt's voice skillfully for its own self-promotion, for the figure of William Pitt sits like a demigod in the centre of the century, booming out its voice on behalf of the nation.

It is a voice so powerful, and a myth of voice so productive that long after his death the myth continued, expanding in dimensions, rather than decreasing, attaining the status of inviolable truth. In this way Pitt's own self-mythologization, his turning of his personality into myth, his troping of private self into public property, the property of the nation, became complete. William Pitt, the patriot minister, the first to put principle in front of interest, the good of the nation before the good of party, the body of the people before his own body. His, and his alone, was the Voice of Liberty:

But to whom do we owe this Honour? To whom are we obliged to for these extraordinary Instances of Political and National Regard? I think there is no Occasion to point out the Great Man; his Merits have rendered him more conspicuous than the Imbecility of my Pen can pretend to; if we speak of a *Demosthenes*, or a *Cicero* we degrade him, for they both took Bribes; but He, superior to either of them, has broke open the Cabinet, and drove the Monsters of Bribery and Corruption from their Hold; and, with the Voice of Liberty, alarmed a Nation just nodding to Destruction.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The voice of liberty. An occasional essay on the behaviour and conduct of the English nation* (London, 1756), pp. 14–15.

The voice so well known it need not be named: indeed to name the voice, to speak its name is already to diminish one's own self-standing. The voice is sacrosanct, an asset of the nation, an index to and personification of the nation's well-being. It speaks with the tones of grandeur, it speaks the might of England and the truth of liberty.

Such a voice is not without its detractors, its competitors for the tone and timbre of the vox populi. Indeed: 'As an honest Man he has been looked upon as a Monster by those who were then in Power; as an Orator, his great Elocution, Ease, and Energy of Sentiment, confirm him an useful Ornament to the Nation' [19]. The voice will out, however, because the nation needs it, needs to be heard, needs to hear itself speak with one voice. It is this aspect of the voice, its healing and unifying powers, that clinches the affair: the Voice of Liberty speaks for and to all free-born Englishmen: it unites the separate interests of the nation in its manifest and open disavowal of personal interest:

When our Welfare is so firmly fixed, what Glory and Honour will circumsolve the Royal Head of that happy Monarch, who shall sit upon the British Throne. Distant Nations shall worship him with a Regard equal to his exalted and Sublime Station: he shall receive the Applauses of a good and grateful People: his Ministers will act with an inflexible Concurrence to support his Dignity, and render his Fame more extensive, in order to support their own: Monarchical, Ministerial, and Popular Interests will be one and the same; for nothing can be more destructive to a Constitution than separate Interests.[22]

A disembodied voice, then, slowly attaches itself to the self-produced myth of William Pitt, the Great Commoner. A voice that places England within history, that places the voice of England next to the great voices of Antiquity; a voice that speaks history, speaks the perpetuity of the Nation.

So powerful was this will to history, so vital that the Voice of Liberty rival that of Antiquity that William Godwin, in his *History of the Life of William Pitt*, almost lacks the words to describe the power of this great voice. For it was a voice sublime:

But the eloquence of Lord Chatham was one of his most striking characteristics. *He far outstripped his competitors, and stood alone, the rival of antiquity.*

He has tropes and sallies, that may justly vie, with the noblest flights of antiquity. And he certainly leaves his coadjutors, as far behind him, as ever did a Cicero, or a Demosthenes.

His eloquence was of every kind. No man excelled him, in close argument, and methodical deduction. But this was not the stile, into which he naturally fell. His oratory was unlaboured and spontaneous. He rushed, at once, upon his Subject; and usually illustrated it, rather by glowing language, and original conception, than by cool reasoning. His person was tall and dignified. His face was the face of an eagle. His piercing eye widened the nerves, and looked through the souls of his opponents. His countenance was stern, and the the voice of thunder sat upon his lips. Anon, however, he could descend to the easy and playful. His voice seemed scarcely more adapted, to energy, and to terror; than it did, to the melodious, the insinuating, and the sportive. If however, in the enthusiasm of admiration, we can find room, for the frigidity of criticism; his action

seemed the most open to objection. It was forcible, uniform, ungraceful. In a word, the most celebrated orators of antiquity, were, in a great measure, the children of labour and cultivation. Lord Chatham was always natural and himself.<sup>2</sup>

Pitt, never someone else, always himself; the great voice of the nation embodied in one man, the voice of the present rivalling that of antiquity, the voice of England asserting itself for history.

Yet, Godwin maintains, future epochs will hardly countenance such a myth, history will diminish the voice's power, and hence the reach towards the sublime, the only discourse capable of representing such a voice. Godwin remarks:

Posterity will hardly be persuaded, that one man could have concentrated the arduous characters of the greatest statesmen, and the most accomplished rhetorician, that ever lived. In a word, posterity will, with difficulty, believe the felicity of Britain: that Lord Chatham was, among the orators, what Shakespear is, among the poets of every age. 'The child of fancy, he warbled the irregular notes, that nature gave', with so sweet a grace; as turned the cheek of envy pale, and drove refinement, and trammelled science, into coward flight. Honeyed music dropped unbidden from his lips. Had he, like his great predecessor, addressed his effusions to the troubled waves; the troubled waves had suspended themselves to listen. His lips were cloathed, with inspiration and prophecy. Sublimity, upon his tongue, sat, so enveloped in beauty, that it seemed, unconscious of itself. It fell upon us unexpected, it took us by surprise, and, like the fearful whirlpool, it drew understanding, and every heart, into its vortex.[301]

The voice sublime, the voice that speaks all voices, that speaks with one voice for all voices, the voice of liberty.

<sup>2</sup> William Godwin, *The History of the Life of William Pitt* (London, 1783), pp. 297-9.

## 6 Of the Gesture of the Orator: the Speaking Subject

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This chapter on theories of elocution will focus primarily upon the years immediately following the period 1756–63 in order to test the assumptions prevalent in the first three chapters concerning the historical specificity of the discourse of the sublime and the discourse of debt. As stated in the introduction the range and kind of historical materials taken for investigation will change in the three main chapters of this second part. Initially we will follow through the aftermath of the Seven Years War in an adjacent field of study in order to note how the excess we have located in theories of sublimity and treatises on the national debt is figured as an autonomous subject in works of elocution. I do not mean to suggest that this is the only way of tracing the excess in the period immediately following the war, or that theories of elocution are the only location for constructions of subjectivity during this period. Rather I wish to extend the analysis of the constitutive features of the discourse of the sublime into a neighbouring discourse in order to trace more fully the ways in which the subject arises as a discursive phenomenon that requires discursive legislation.

We can begin with a few comments about the status of the field of enquiry known to eighteenth-century writers as elocution. This, I hope, will point to good effect the discussion of the elocutionary movement, which came to prominence during the 1760s. Elocution began its eighteenth-century life as one of the four parts of rhetoric, a subsection of an age-old 'art' of persuasion, less understood than practised, perhaps, but nevertheless still a part of the contemporary taxonomy of knowledge, still part of the hierarchy of discourses, even if only a minor category of the more important discourse of rhetoric. A typical example of an early eighteenth-century textbook on rhetoric defines the topic in the following manner:

Rhetoric is the Art of Speaking or Writing well and ornamentally on any Subject. Its Principal End is to Instruct, Persuade and Please.

The Parts it consists of are four, viz. INVENTION, DISPOSITION, ELOCUTION, and PRONUNCIATION.<sup>1</sup>

This follows the classical division of rhetoric into five parts, inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria and actio, but leaves out memoria, or memory. The reduction to four parts follows the Ramists, who, most commentators on eighteenth-century rhetorical theory would agree, influenced, by and large, all the early English rhetoricians. Holmes goes on to specify definitions for all four parts, giving the following for elocution: 'ELOCUTION consists in the finding out *propter, polite, and ornamental* Expressions to signify our Thoughts' [part III]. Within the limited domain of rhetorical theory the difference between elocution and pronunciation would have been explained through recourse to the body: in pronunciation the speaker brings the text to life through both his voice and his physical movement. Holmes, again:

PRONUNCIATION, or *Moving Delivery*, which is the very Soul of all Rhetoric, consists in a due Management of the Voice and Countenance, as well as the proper *Gesture* of the body and Hands, according to the Nature of the Passion or Thing spoken of. [part IV]

It is this translation of text into physical movement, of thought into facial expression that I want to concentrate on. It is not the case that the elocution movement, which is generally taken as beginning during the 1760s, discovered by itself gesture and facial expression – these physical aspects were present in classical rhetoric – but what does distinguish it, as we shall see, is its *insistence* on the importance of gesture, body movement and tone of voice. I want to understand this insistence as part of a larger network of legislative discourses upon the body – the topic under discussion throughout Part II of this book. It will also become apparent that this insistence is itself a legislative manoeuvre on the part of elocutionary theory, and can be seen as its 'excess'. I shall characterize this legislative move in a number of ways in the following chapters, but the dominant informing movement is one from a voice-centred to a text-centred discursivity: precisely the figuring of Pitt's voice, from vocal sound to mythological text, or the familiarization of an endlessly increasing debt in which the sum of money is troped from a 'real' sum into an 'imaginary' textual figure. This movement, which has already been noted in different contexts, is echoed here in elocutionary theory through its insistence on both voice and body, and this leads it to a conceptualization of the difference between the sound of the voice and the textualization of the body. This insistence on gesture and so

<sup>1</sup> John Holmes, *The Art of Rhetoric made easy* (London, 1739), p. 1; in following citations page references are lacking because of the absence of page numbers in the text.

forth is to be located within the wider network of social and political spaces occupied by the body so that the 'excess' of elocutionary theory, which results from both a desire to legislate the body, and a production of the body to be legislated, should be seen in relation to this broader context.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, I shall be examining elocutionary theory in relation to the discursive excess, as sketched out in the first part of this book, and the elocutionary movement as *one* of the ways the mid-eighteenth century sets out to legislate subjectivity.

Thus I shall begin by describing the internal production of the excess by elocutionary theory; this will later be identified in shorthand as the autonomous subject. I propose to do this by outlining the distances between Sheridan, the movement's first major figure, and two eighteenth-century works of rhetoric which are also concerned with elocution and gesture: *The art of speaking in public: or An essay on the action of an orator* (1727) and John Wesley's *Directions concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* (1770).

Both of these texts signal their departure from rhetorical theory proper by announcing in their titles the focus on pronunciation and action. In the case of *The art of speaking in public* the author calls into question the prevailing tendency to ignore the physical aspects of oratory, a tendency prevalent since classical times: 'This is that Faculty of Oratory, which Tully calls the *Eloquence of the Body*: And it is a Matter of so great Moment for the prevalent Influences and Effects it has upon the Mind, that 'twere to be wish'd the *Ancients* had treated of *ACTIO*N with as much Exactness of Method, and in as ample a manner as they have established the other three Parts of *Rhetoric*.'<sup>3</sup>

A large portion of the essay is spent discussing the manipulation of the voice, however, putting forward a very common analysis of the mimetic basis of pronunciation:

If your *Speech* proceeds from a *violent Passion*, it produces a *violent Pronunciation*: if it comes from a *Peaceable* and *Gentle Thought*, the *Pronunciation* again is as *Peaceable*, *Gentle*

<sup>2</sup> The need to produce this body, and for it to be seen as legislated and controlled has direct relevance within the social and political: for, what we will be tracing is the mechanism by which a certain cultural elite maintained its political power through the exercise of its (divine) right to control the social space of the body. In this regard Sheridan's attempts to school people in the ways of that cultural hegemony can be seen as merely opportunistic. His contribution to changing social and political territories is negligible, and even seems reactionary when placed next to his more activist dissenting contemporaries. However, seeing Sheridan in this light may be no more than a recognition of the prevailing cultural hegemony, and that 'individualism' was far from a populist concept, still less could it be said to characterize eighteenth-century society in *in toto*. The privileged few may be said to have authored, spoken, or seen themselves. For the rest things remained as they had been for some considerable time, with the sense of obedience far stronger than any putative sense of self.

<sup>3</sup> *The art of speaking in public: or An essay on the action of an orator* (London, 1727), p. 8. This text is the second English translation of the French *Traité de l'action de l'orateur* (Paris, 1676) by Le Faucheur. For a history of this text and its translations into English see W. S. Howell, *Eighteenth Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 164–81.

and *Calm*: So that the *Orator* would do well to adjust every *Tone* and *Accent* of his *Voice* to each *Passion* that afflicts or overjoys him, which he would raise in *others* to a Degree of *Sympathy*. [99]

One can find these kinds of statement in almost every work on correct pronunciation and speech written during the first half of the century. The idea that tone and pronunciation are directly linked to 'passion' is often extended to the divide between word and thought, so that the gestures of the body come to be seen as translating the 'thought' behind the words given body by the voice. Again, the standard line about the 'seduction' perpetrated by an orator upon his audience can be found here in the description of the malleability of the hearer: [they] have such an Influence over the Minds of their Hearers whom they go about to seduce with fair Speeches, as to make them conceive Things with Apprehension or Astonishment, with Sadness or with Joy, to raise the Passions, and to turn them to what Point of Doctrine they please. [33]

In this scenario the audience is moved by the seductive tones of the orator – the sensations or passions aroused in the hearer's breast are the direct result of an impassioned speech.<sup>4</sup> On account of this the subject loses some of its individuality and autonomy: he or she is not in complete control of interior states of mind, which are, in part at least, determined by external effects. Although it would be hasty to conclude that the subject was seen as *only* being the product of another's speech, the extent to which it was seen as self-determining and self-authenticating was severely limited. This concept of the subject, as a product of society, or as a requirement only for social intercourse, is difficult for us to grasp, since our own notions of subjectivity are almost entirely the opposite. The collective social experience which necessitates, if it does not produce, the subject is, however, certainly present to the early eighteenth-century. One of the reasons why the careful delineation of the rules of speech and gesture is required relates to the legislation of collective social experience of self. The texts with which we shall be concerned in the second part of this book all participate, to varying extents, within this legislative project, and all, in some measure, question the construction of the subject in sociality. As they do so the subject increasingly becomes a point of issue: a term and a discourse itself which can, and must be contained on behalf of certain interested parties. Thus, the texts under discussion often breach the peace in that they describe or open up, often against their own

<sup>4</sup> This speech is highly figurative since rhetorical use is the 'natural' expression of passion. See Thomas Leland, *A dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence* (London, 1764), p. 77. 'A considerable part of human speech is addressed solely or principally to the passions and affections. Each of these hath its peculiar mode of expression, in all languages, the same in kind, tho' sometimes differing in the degree of boldness and vehemence, according to the different strength or liveliness of the inward emotion. These different modes are indeed marked by Rhetoricians, and ranged into different classes of *Tropes* and *Figures*; but they derive their origin neither from artifice nor refinement. They are in themselves, the *real, natural*, and *necessary* result of *real* passion and emotion, tho', like other signs of truth, they may be perverted to the purposes of deceit.'

manifest aims, the space in which we will find the self-authenticating subject. However, being keen to the working of any discourse we should not rush hastily in and claim that such breaches represent a 'real' emergence of the subject as self-authenticating, the emergence of the independent entrepreneur who produces and enters into the economics of his own identity. Rather, we should be alert to the more devious argument in which to claim that this subject emerges is to make certain political capital, on behalf and in the interests of a minority within the social, cultural, national community.<sup>5</sup> It is certainly the case that the elocutionary movement participates within the politics of the subject along these lines. Before we are able to tackle these wider political positionings, however, we need to describe the wavering between the description of the subject as social effect and as self-authenticating in elocutionary theory.

The differing subject positions generated by and in the social are the sub-text of the last sections of the essay on gesture in *The art of speaking in public*, where the author requests forbearance since 'the Business of *Gesture* is far more difficult to observe, than that of *Pronunciation*' [175] – a comment that is rather strange given that the gestural is, precisely, visual. The difficulty is addressed through the implied hierarchy of 'subjects' in the performance space of the oration: here the 'subject position' is not one to which every 'subject' has equal access so that the person who might observe, a member of the audience, is considerably diminished in his or her powers of self-determination. It is the orator who in some measure produces the subject positions available for individual members of the audience: it is his power as an orator that determines the framework for the experience of subjectivity for his listeners, his power that holds them in his sway. It would be difficult, therefore, to imagine how any one individual might stand outside that seductive space and view the scene objectively, as if he or she were constituted independently of the place of subjectivity.

From the side of the orator considerable problems also arise because 'a *Man* may *hear* his *own Voice* well enough when he cannot *see* his *Face* at all: and as for the other *Parts* of his *Body*, he can but see *them* imperfectly, how they move and keep up to the *Rules* of *good Action*' [175]. In order to control and legislate the movement of the body a powerful social sense of decorum is needed: a set of unspoken rules which determine one's conduct within a potentially explosive area of human contact, in which the languages of the body may communicate on their own, as it were, without the consent of the orator. Perhaps the most pervasive form of these 'body languages', and the one which can be controlled most easily,

<sup>5</sup> This only serves to bring to our attention the problematics surrounding the spacing of the individual: what is it to be 'in' the social or national? Who is allowed access to these powerful descriptions, in which places, under what conditions? My use of the male pronoun is intended to reinforce this point.

is that conducted by and through the eye. The following practice is recommended in regard to this:

As for your *Eyes*, you must always be casting them upon some or other of your *Auditors* and rolling them gently about from this *Side* to *that*, with an *Air* of *Regard* sometimes upon *one Person* and sometimes upon *another*: and not fix 'em like *Darts* that are once *shot*, still upon *one Place* of your *Auditory*, as many People do to their great *Disadvantage*: For it is so very *disagreeable* and *dull*, that it affects the *Persons* before whom we speak, much less than when we look them decently in the *Face*, as we use to do in *familiar* and *common Conversation* . . . [183–4]

This is clearly a warning: do not look with indecorous longing upon any member of your audience, do not 'come on' to particular people within the audience, resist the temptation to pierce certain members of the audience with cupid's darts. We might note that such strictures must have produced a very strange listening environment, with the orator rolling his eyes about, carefully and studiously avoiding any intimate or indecorous eye contact.

This avoidance amounts to the erasure or covering up of the legibility of the subject to and within itself; a negation of those inner thoughts and desires which we take to be the very representatives of subjectivity, personality and individuality, in favour of the complete or total legibility of the social subject, the public self. The trajectory of the legislation is clear: public sociability should erase private subjectivity. Because of this it is held that the body of the orator should be transparent: it should merely reflect and represent the passion and sentiments contained within the 'text', be it a text which has been memorized or one that is read from. In this way it is the 'text' that conditions and controls the manifestation of the subject, and certainly not the other way around. While the rules of decorum, for example, might be termed the unwritten legislative text for sociability, it is the rules of elocution that determine the subject's bodily representation, and hence its public textualization.

Thus, in referring to the mouth, that erotic and sensuous area of the face which naturally draws attention to itself in public oration, we find the following caution: 'As for your *Lips*, you must take care not to *bite* 'em, nor to *lick* 'em with your *Tongue*, as I have seen some People do sometimes; which is very *Ungentle* and *indecent* in an *Orator*' [193]. Perhaps more than anything else Sheridan's awareness and insistence upon the sexuality articulated by the social situation of public speaking marks his distance from this terror of impolite and indecorous behaviour. This difference in attitude to the rules of decorum becomes more complex when we consider the possibility that no working notion of the individual's ability to control and contain his or her own emotions, passions and reactions to and within the social is present to *The art of speaking in public*; that it lacks any working concept of the positioning of the subject. Where and how could one control the chaos of the real if the individual were seen merely as a

reflection within and off public space, an effect of the discourse of society, and not its principal agent.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley moves more in the direction of Sheridan's political analysis of the place of speech, yet his notion of the physical manipulation of the body is still tied to the mimetic notion that gesture should follow meaning, that the body should accurately translate thought. His strictures on correct oration do, however, significantly add to the repertoire of the discourse of control in two important ways. The first is his advice concerning efficacious oration: 'On all occasions let the thing you are to speak be deeply imprinted on your own heart: and when you are sensibly touch'd yourself, you will easily touch others, by adjusting your voice to every passion which you feel.'<sup>7</sup> Here the body is a kind of resonator, bringing into vibration the passions embedded within the text. The audience, in this description, is presumed almost to feel the vibration emanating from the speaker. Thus, while it may appear to be necessary for this analysis to have a notion of the individual, the autonomous subject who can recognize the passions in his or her own heart, in fact such a description of the subject is diluted by the prior existence of the text: the subject does not produce for him or herself these passions, rather, he or she makes the body and its voice as receptive as possible to those 'things' which 'imprint' themselves. These inanimate objects may themselves be given body, translated into the 'passion' felt and communicated, but that is merely to reinforce the dependence of the subject on the external. It is the text that both contains and controls the originating forces of 'passion', and which aids in the textualization of the human body as it is translated from dead letter to living, aural and visual, speech.

This can be noted in Wesley's compendious system of rules for tones of voice; the correct sounds that bring the text to life. So, for example, 'After the expression of any violent passion, you should gradually lower your voice again'<sup>[7]</sup>, a direction that seems sensible enough, but when compounded by the following prescriptions becomes rather oppressive:

Love is shewn by a soft, smooth, and melting voice: hate by a sharp and sullen one: joy by a full and flowing one: grief by a dull, languishing tone; some times interrupted by a sigh or

<sup>6</sup> I make this point in as extreme a fashion as possible in order to draw out the full implications of the legislative power of elocutionary theory. It should be pointed out that J. Jones, for example, did not lack these centring notions of subjectivity; he comments on the control of the speaking subject: 'The life of action, is in the face, and consists in the voice, eyes, brows, and mouth, and therefore, the whole face should be adjusted to the matter in hand. Action should be exactly with utterance, and every gesture, should express the nature of the words he is uttering. When he introduces another speaking, he should use such actions only as are proper for him. J. Jones, *Remarks on the English Language, with rules for speech and action* (Birmingham, 1774), p. 17. Something of an ambiguity exists here, as to whether the 'him' refers to the second speaker, or to the first. I am taking it as the latter, based on the further contextual evidence of the treatise; such evidence, however, is far from conclusive.

<sup>7</sup> John Wesley, *Directions concerning Pronunciation and Gesture* (Bristol, 1770), p. 7.

groan. Fear is express'd by a trembling and hesitating voice: Boldness by speaking loud and strong. Anger is shewn by a sharp and impetuous tone, taking the breath often, and speaking short. Compassion requires a soft and submissive voice. [7]

These are less directions for bringing into speech, guidelines for performance, than descriptions of the bodily or tonal characteristics of the passions; they are, in this sense, less to do with the individual, with the translation of text into a specific body, than with an entire taxonomy of tonal variations which accompany various emotional states. It is not a specific body that is under analysis, or a specific vocalization of the text, but the 'body' of passion or emotion – the tonal effects which correspond to these inner feelings. It is evident from this that the presence of any particular individual, of a unique vocal tone 'belonging' to a person, is never addressed since the body is a given, and is uniform. One might want to object to this reading, and point out that Wesley is merely participating within a very familiar augustin project – the search for as fine and sensitive a taxonomic ordering of the world as possible – or that his directions for tonal variation assume a variation from individual to individual. Furthermore, the audience addressed by this work may change our opinions regarding it, since the real aim of this instruction book is to teach people with no voice how to be heard.<sup>8</sup>

Above I have quoted two of the numbered paragraphs from Wesley's *Directions* that come under the section heading of 'Particular Rules for varying the Voice'; there are nineteen all told, and they cover most of the possible variations in tone required by different forms of persuasion, from whether one is proving something, refuting the claims made by someone else, to answering objections and so on. The following section treats 'Of Gesture', and begins:

That this silent language of your face and hands may move the affections of those that see and hear you, it must be well adjusted to the subject, as well as to the passion which you desire either to express or excite. It must likewise be free from all affectation, and such as appears to be the mere, natural result, both of the things you speak, and of the affection that moves you to speak them. And the whole is so to be managed, that there may be nothing in all the dispositions and motions of your body, to offend the eyes of the spectators. [9]

This touches upon the most important aspect of the gestural language which accompanies speech: that it may communicate something on its own, that the language of the body may speak to the audience without due and proper regard for the content of the orator's performance. Although Wesley prefers to imagine an ill-fitting gestural language as the most obvious form of mismatch, one in which the orator attempts to translate his passions into gesture through the use of incorrect movements, the possibility of an alternative language of

<sup>8</sup> This question concerning the political ramifications of the elocutionary movement will be discussed below.



gesture which is nothing less than an autonomous language of the body, out of the controlling force of the text of the speech, is certainly present.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, he maintains that the 'eyes' of the spectators should on no account be offended; 'eyes' are here, of course, metonymically referring to the moral sense. In order to guard against this the neophyte orator should practise either in front of a mirror, or with 'some skilful and faithful friend' [10]. This reflection of the subject to itself in the mirror opens up a distance between reflection and subject in which the subject may come to recognize itself as subject. Should the orator practise this way he learns to become his own judge of decorum. This, we should note, runs counter to the implied techniques of control offered by Wesley in his second suggestion, that of practising in front of a 'skilful' friend. The skills in the possession of the friend are less his than the generalized codes of conduct which determine the scene of oration. In more general terms the friend is used less as a reference point for subjectivity than as a marker or reflector of the correct societal codes of behaviour. In this case the orator places himself in front of the judge of custom, he learns the correct forms of decorum that are articulated by individuals within society, but not the sole property of any one individual. The crucial thing to note here is that the second situation – practice with a friend – remains within a description of the experience of subjectivity that is generated by the reflective surfaces of public space. Our period, the eighteenth century most generally, is teeming with such reflective surfaces: the interior of the country house with its profusion of signs signifying the ethical, aesthetic and political 'taste' of the owner, the landscaped garden with its demonstration of the harmonious connection of property to propriety, these and many more surfaces not only 'contain' specific meanings they also reflect the qualities inhering in them back onto the individual who participates within their circuit of power. The first situation, however, in which the mirror is used as the reflective surface breaks out of this social public reflexivity to embrace a private, interior reflection of the subject to itself.

There are yet further ramifications in the distinction between these two forms of practice: in the first instance the orator must learn to read his own body as if it were not a part of himself. That is, he must read it as if it were someone else standing in front of him delivering a speech. This form of distancing in which the subject recognizes the interruption of subjectivity, the space between the internalized and idealized form of the self and the exterior physical manifesta-

<sup>9</sup> This fear is best expressed in Walker's stricture about the relationship between the movement of the body and the subject expressed by the speaker. He advises that 'a general style of action be adopted, as shall be easily conceived and easily executed, which, though not expressive of any particular passion, shall not be inconsistent with the expression of any passion; which shall always keep the body in a graceful position, and shall so vary its motions, at proper intervals, as to seem the subject operating on the speaker, and not the speaker on the subject.' John Walker, *The Academic Speaker* (Dublin, 1800), p. ii.

tion, is one marker of our more contemporary notion of the subject. We notice such distancing and discrepancy continually, from the photograph that we claim is not a true likeness, or the tape recording which distorts our voice out of our own recognition. This contemporary sense of subjectivity is founded within an enormous technology of control – no less, of course, than the rather different sense we are tracing during the eighteenth century. In the citation above, however, gesture and subject are explicitly connected – 'well adjusted' – so that the possibility of a discrepancy between the subject who makes certain gestural movements and the subject read off from these movements is minimized. It is only to correct the error of mismatch or discrepancy that one would look in a mirror; the subject, as yet, is far from an independent being; it is the construct or welding together of the two subjects referred to above.

In the second rule for practice the orator is encouraged to see himself with another's eyes. He is taught to understand his physical body as a projection upon another body: where self-reflection tends to characterize the mirror scene, self-abnegation operates in the social. Rather than attempt to see one's self reflected on the surface of the other, one attempts to erase all trace of person, all the marks of personality so that the passions felt in the inner physical space of the orator, passions that have their origin and legislated conduct in the text, are precisely translated into the passion felt by the spectator or hearer.<sup>10</sup> The body is merely a transparent medium through which ideas, sensation or sentiment pass.

The face has traditionally been associated with a window, as if we both see through it to the deeper feelings within the breast, and stare at it, watching as those inner feelings are displayed upon the screen in front of us. Because of this the face is of crucial importance, as Wesley remarks: 'But 'tis the face which gives the greatest life to action: of this therefore you must take the greatest care, that nothing may appear disagreeable in it, since 'tis continually in the view of all but yourself' [10]. This is the central problem posed by the face: it may give a different impression from that conveyed by what one says or intends to say. Hence, more than any other feature of the human body it must be controlled, monitored and harnessed to the sense of the oration. Again, Wesley recommends that one practise with a 'looking-glass' or a 'faithful friend', who,

<sup>10</sup> This discussion of the translation of sensation from one 'body' into another has a further discursive context, that of Adam Smith's investigation of 'moral sentiments'. The opening of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in its articulation of a theory of 'sympathy' states: 'As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. . . . By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.' pp. 1–2.

presumably, will see with the eyes of decorum. His advice to the novice continues:

You should adapt all its movements to the subject you treat of, the passions you would raise, and the persons to whom you speak. Let love or joy spread a cheerfulness over your face; hatred, sorrow, or fear a gloominess. Look with gravity and authority on your inferiors; on your superiors with boldness mixt with respect. [10]

These are no more than commonplaces of correct conduct: the face should be animated according to the correct behaviour determined by any social situation; the face should represent and reflect one's social standing. Such careful consideration of facial expression is of course fully extended to the entire body, so that: 'The mouth must never be turned awry: neither must you bite or lick your lips, or shrug up your shoulders; or lean upon your elbow; all which give just offence to the spectators' [11]. One might want to know why such physical movement necessarily gave 'just offence' to the spectators, but precise documentation concerning such common codes of behaviour is difficult to find. Thus while one can find many examples of conduct books, prescriptive grammars of physical behaviour – don't speak with your mouth full, and so on – one would be very unlikely to find a history of those rules, still less a critical examination of them.<sup>11</sup>

If we assume that this grammar of physical movement was inculcated to an enormous extent in the youth of the time, it must have seemed somewhat bewildering at first to be in polite company, given that not only the words being declaimed required interpreting, but also the various gestures. Something of this bewilderment can be invoked by Wesley's tenth paragraph on gesture:

We make use of the hand a thousand different ways; only very little at the beginning of a discourse. Concerning this, you may observe the rules following: 1. Never clap your hands, nor thump the pulpit: 2. Use the right hand most, and when you use the left, let it be only to accompany the other: 3. The right hand may be gently applied to the breast, when you speak of your own faculties, heart or conscience: 4. You must begin your action with your speech, and end it when you make an end of speaking: 5. The hands should seldom be lifted up higher than the eyes, nor let down lower than the breast: 6. Your eyes should always have your hands in view, so that they you speak to may see your eyes, your mouth and your hands, all moving in concert with each other, and expressing the same thing: 7. Seldom stretch out your arms side-ways, more than half a foot from the trunk of your body: 8. Your hands are not to be in perpetual motion: this the antients call'd, The babbling of the hands.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> A further problem arises when we attempt to ascertain how far these rules were actually obeyed. Evidence for this is scanty; if we are tempted to turn to the imaginative literature of the period the problems become further compounded since the novel, for example, was hardly an innocent protagonist in the battle to legislate public and private behaviour. This is discussed in detail in ch. 10.

The striking feature of this passage is the obsessive concern with limiting *excess*, of monitoring unnecessary or indecorous movement. Everything must be contained within the polite economy of minimal physical gesture, an economy of the body that carefully legislates the licentious or excessive.<sup>13</sup>

Wesley closes his *Directions* with a few remarks about the concentration required by an orator as he speaks. Here he recommends avoiding anything that interferes with the performance, such as a studied appearance of concentration, an appearance that one might think would have been more than likely, given the large number of rules and directions that had to be followed. The worst performances *look* as if they are precisely that, performances.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Wesley cautions 'while you are actually speaking, you must not be studying any other motions, but those that naturally arise from the subject of your discourse, from the place where you speak, and the characters of the persons whom you address' [12].

The full extent of this visual noise surrounding the place of speech – at least it seems 'noise' to our sense of public oration<sup>15</sup> – is brought out by Wesley's final

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also *A help to elocution and eloquence* (London, 1770), pp. 18–19: 'every Motion should be the natural Attendant of what is spoken; if an Extreme cannot be avoided, I would rather recommend *no* Action than *too* much, or than such as must offend judicious Eyes.'

<sup>13</sup> This excess has the potential to eradicate subjectivity completely. We have already seen this in the annihilation of the subject in the face of God in Burke's *Enquiry*. Speech or eloquence may have the same effect, as described by Leland in his *A dissertation on the Principles of Human Eloquence*, p. 63: 'A man finds a vast hidden treasure: he is seized with a sudden joy, which is too violent for his frame, and he faints away. But this depression surely proves not only that he felt this passion of joy, but that he felt it in excess.'

<sup>14</sup> This brings into question the dynamics of possession in the oratorical performance, for the most skilful orator literally takes possession of his audience in order to make them unaware of his presence. This is made explicit in Francis Gentleman's *Introduction to Shakespeare's Plays, containing an essay on oratory* (London 1773), p. 15: 'In public speaking, as well as in poetry and painting, art should be carefully concealed: where perceptible, it has a coarse and mean aspect. The orator should so intirely possess his audience of the subject, as to make them forget the speaker.'

<sup>15</sup> We are unaccustomed to such continuous physical movement as recommended by Walker in the following: 'When the pupil has pronounced one sentence in the position thus described, the hand, as if lifeless, must drop down to the side, the very moment the last accented word is pronounced, and the body, without altering the place of the feet, poize itself on the left leg, while the left hand raises itself into exactly the same position as the right was before, and continues in this position till the end of the next sentence, when it drops down on the side as if dead; and the body, poizing itself on the right leg as before, continues with the right arm extended, till the end of the succeeding sentence, and so on from right to left, and from left to right alternately, till the speech is ended.' Walker, *The Academic Speaker*, p. iii.

comment about the observation of these rules in common daily converse: 'I would advise you, lastly, to observe, these rules as far as things permit, even in your common conversation, 'till you have got a perfect habit of observing them, so that they are, as it were, natural to you' [12].

We can note from this that these rules of oratorical performance and their accompanying directions for physical gesture legislate more than merely public oration. At their full extent they control and condition the physical space of the subject: they determine the presence of the subject, its articulation within physical space.<sup>16</sup> This control is, in the last analysis, the strongest indicator of the refusal of the excess, the unwillingness to move into a theory of subjectivity which allows the individual to control space, as opposed to space controlling the individual: social decorum tells the individual how to move; the individual is contained in and represented by those movements. Thus Wesley's very last comments:

And whenever you hear an eminent speaker, observe with the utmost attention, what conformity there is between his action, and utterance, and these rules. You may afterwards imitate him at home, 'till you have made his graces your own. And when once by such assistance as these, you have acquired a good habit of speaking, you will no more need any tedious reflections upon this art, but will speak as easily as gracefully. [12]

The good student, then, eradicates all trace of his own personality in his practice at imitating, as precisely as possible, the movements and gestures of his exemplary orator. Although there is a sense in which this imitation can be seen as an appropriation, such an aggressively individualistic position does not correspond to the main force of Wesley's strictures. As we can see from the above, the student should be less interested in appropriating any particular orator's habits of gesture than in copying the *fit* between a given gesture and expression. The student is far from engaged in a struggle over the ownership of self, over propriety understood in its strong sense, since his main efforts are directed towards the eradication of the misfit between his person and his gesture. In this way the avowed aim is to reduce self to performance, to erase personality through the correct application of the rules which guarantee attitude, gesture, and polite decorum; those things which stand in the place of, and are read before person.

<sup>16</sup> This is even more clear in the later handbook by Henry Lemoine, *The Art of Speaking* (London, 1797), pp. 57–8 where the following cautionary precepts are given in relation to the eyes: 'These should be carried from one part of the audience to another, with a modest and decent respect; which will tend to recall and fix attention, and animate your own spirit by observing their attention fixed. But if their affections be strongly moved, and the observing it be a means of raising your own too high, it will be necessary then to keep the eye from off them – For tho' an orator should always be animated, he should never be overcome by his passion.' Once again the site of struggle is clearly over the mastery of self. Here the orator respects public decorum by restraining his private inner self and passions so that he is not 'overcome' by them.

Consequently, in the polite social world of converse it was highly likely that one read the manners for the man, the outward appearance for the inner substance. This troubled eighteenth-century thinkers less than it does us, since the notions of the persistence of subjectivity and its proper ownership only gradually emerge as determining features of the self. The subject was taken to be a construct in speech, in society, which neither threatened nor lessened the position of the individual vis-à-vis other individuals. In relation to this constructivity the doctrine concerning the unification of personal and general interests is extremely important, since the action of making them identical is one of the ways in which a potential excess is defused or refused. If there were a surplus, something that was left over in the equation of public and private interest, it would need to be legislated, taken account of. It is precisely that *taking account* which proves so troublesome, since if the books do not balance the very fact that they do not produces an unwanted quantity, perhaps unnamed, perhaps powerless, but nevertheless present.

I want to suggest that in the attempt to specify to the last possible degree the physical movement of the body in speech – the end result of a theory of elocution that is no more than an insertion within the taxonomy of public decorum – the tensions that are produced within the legislative theory to contain all possible practice become overwhelming and the taxonomy breaks down in the familiar way: the legislative theory first recognizes and then casts out the unlegislable. This rupture in the surface of the theory begins to become manifest during the 1760s, and is most clearly present to the theories of Sheridan.

However, before we discuss Sheridan's work in detail we shall examine one work which condenses the entire effort made during the early part of the century to codify physical gesture and legislate it through speech: James Burgh's *The Art of Speaking* (1763). This text is perhaps the most important work on elocution published during the 1760s; it is less interesting than some of Sheridan's works, but it displays the tensions referred to above to such an extent that it could be termed the crux text, representing for us the inevitable breakdown of a taxonomy of gesture which did not recognize the spacing of the subject, that the individual colours and conditions his or her own physical appearance. It signals, to us, the forceful entry of the autonomous subject into theories of speech, and the beginnings of a shift from descriptions of the subject in terms of voice, performance, body to those in terms of text, persistence, mind.

Burgh starts out very forcefully by claiming that the 'most important' part of speaking is *delivery*, comprehending what every gentleman ought to be master of respecting *gesture*, *looks* and command of *voice*<sup>17</sup> and he then goes on to formulate an entire language of the body, a language that conforms to and expresses the passions. Burgh's project is to yoke together internal states of mind

<sup>17</sup> James Burgh, *The Art of Speaking* (London, 1763), p. 2.

and external manifestations of them so that the identity between the two languages – of the passions and of the body – is maintained.

Accordingly, physical gesture and tone of voice take precedence over the content of speech:

What we mean does not so much depend upon the words we speak, as on our manner of speaking them; and accordingly, in life, the greatest attention is paid to this, as expressive of what our words often give no indication of. Thus nature fixes the outward expression of every intention or sentiment of the mind. [12–13]

Words may deceive us, physical gestures and expression cannot. Of course in order for this direct communication of the body to function adequately Burgh needs to make the connection between nature and expression a necessary yoking, otherwise the physical language of the body would be merely arbitrary, and open to all kinds of differing interpretations. Hence, in a very typical neoclassical movement of authentication, nature is summoned up in order to ratify body language; indeed the body, in this instance, is no more than a conductor for natural sentiment or passion. In understanding another human being we are less understanding the person than the passion or sentiment that is displayed, written across the body in front of us. For:

Every part of the human frame contributes to express the passions and emotions of the mind, and to shew, in general, its present state. The head is sometimes erected, sometimes hung down, sometimes drawn suddenly back with an air of disdain, sometimes shews by a nod, a particular person, or object: gives assent, or denial, by different motions; threatens by one sort of movement, approves by another, and expresses suspicion by a third. [13]

Burgh extends this analysis of the head to include the entire human frame, so that the legs, arms, face and so on all produce signs to be read in terms of the language and according to the dictionary of the passions.

The main purpose of the book then becomes apparent in the descriptions of the correct physical attitude to be taken when expressing the following exhaustive list of 'passions, humours, sentiments, and intentions': Tranquillity, Cheerfulness, Mirth, Railery, Buffoonery, Joy, Delight, Gravity, Enquiry, Attention, Modesty, Perplexity, Vexation, Pity, Grief, Melancholy, Despair, Fear, Shame, Remorse, Courage, Boasting, Pride, Obstinacy, Authority, Commanding, Forbidding, Affirming, Denying, Differing, Agreeing, Exhorting, Judging, Reproving, Acquitting, Condemning, Teaching, Pardoning, Tempting, Promising, Affectation, Sloth, Intoxication, Anger, Peevishness, Malice, Envy, Revenge, Cruelty, Complaining, Fatigue, Commendation, Dotage, Folly, Distraction, Sickness, Fainting and Death. Burgh is humble enough to add 'There may be other humours, or passions, besides these, which a reader, or speaker, may have occasion to express. But these are the *principal*' [27]. As is clear from the above list, Burgh's primary interest is in a complete taxonomy of the passions, as understood by and from their physical manifestation. Consequently, his main focus is less on the classification of internal states of mind, and on their assumed or presumed independent existence, than on the correct

physical language to express these passions. The real legislative force of his text is directed towards the movement of the body: if one takes enough care the body will not lie, it can be harnessed so that it speaks a clear and unambiguous language which can be read by anyone.

Underlying the *Art of Speaking* is a fear that the body may say something else, that it may communicate precisely one's interior thoughts and expressions, or that the unconscious or subconscious may be read from the external body: a fear that the language of the body may be excessive, that it may produce a legible, but far from wanted surplus. Hardly a new fear, and hardly a new form of legislation and control. What it signals for us, though, is the beginning of a recognition that this unwanted legibility, this excessive writing must come from somewhere. It would be stretching things too far to suggest that there is a recognition of the text of the unconscious, but that is clearly the direction in which the discursive analytic is moving.

The rest of Burgh's book in fact resists this movement by listing a very large number of 'reading texts' intended for practice so that the novice may gradually learn those movements and gestures of the body which should accompany specific passions. Thus, turning to a sample text appearing under the main heading of one of the passions, we find in the margin the name of the passion or humour taken to be embedded within the text at precisely the point where it is presumed to be invoked. This marginal note is the prompt for the reader to assume the attitude and make the correct gestures which should accompany the indicated passion.<sup>18</sup>

The full extent of this 'dial-a-passion' is brought out when one turns to the index, where all the passions are listed so that one can simply turn to any relevant text in order to experience the desired sensation. That such a grammar of physical expression should have been compiled is not particularly noteworthy: one might have expected such a taxonomy in the age of reason. However, the production of a textbook which quite clearly functions as an artificial stimulant

<sup>18</sup> This strange textualisation of internal states is a generally dispersed project throughout the period. See Robert Charles Dallas's attempt to enumerate a 'vocabulary of the passions' in his *Miscellaneous Writings*... with a Vocabulary of the Passions (London, 1797); J. Jones, *Remarks on the English Language*; James Usher, *An Introduction to the Theory of the Human Mind* (London, 1771); *The Philosophy of the Passions* (London, 1772); John Walker, *Elements of Eloquence* (London, 1781); and *An Introduction towards an essay on the origins of the passions* (London, 1741).

<sup>19</sup> One of its uses was clearly to practise the outward show of entraptured or passionate experience. This would be useful for those occasions when one was supposed to demonstrate physical passion but did not internally experience it. Thus, Walker writing about the passions states quite baldly: 'But our natural feelings are not always to be commanded; and when they are, stand in need of the regulation and embellishments of art; it is the business, therefore, of every reader and speaker in public to acquire such tones and gestures as nature gives to the passions; that he may be able to produce the semblance of them when he is not actually impassioned.' Walker, *Elements of Eloquence*, II, p. 276.

for experience is worth pondering.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, we should ask what kind of assumptions this makes about the subject, and about the legislation of the body? The first and most obvious point to be made concerns the substitution of the text for the physical presence of a speaker: where before the classifications of speech were linked to the social arena, precisely the place of speech for the works on elocution we have examined above, Burgh's primer suggests that one may translate the 'passion' from the text to the speaker without a legislative social control. This is to claim for the subject an interior speech, so that the subject arouses itself in the reading/speaking situation. This internalized voice necessarily invokes a more complex notion of subjectivity, in which one may not only be self-determined, or aroused, but also split into an inner and outer subject: one might think things one does not say, and say things one might not think. Furthermore, once the text stands in the place of the body of the orator – a major indicator of a move from a voice-centred to a text-centred description of the subject – the uses of and needs for social intercourse become subject to revision: to be excited into self-awareness, self-reflection, by a text may well be a dangerous and irreversible step to make in the legislation of subjectivity.<sup>20</sup>

Because of this another, and equally important, point arises about the notion of interior speech: if one can speak to oneself and become excited by the interior sound of one's own voice then the possibility of auto-eroticism, and of self-authentication and self-generation becomes manifest. It is not that the body produces a physical language which expresses itself, contrary to the intentions of the speaker, but that the body reflects and produces the internal subject. The physical movements of the eye, for example, are not haphazard, moving from one member of the audience to another in a random fashion: rather they are quite deliberate, and in many cases give away the interior thoughts and desires of the speaker. The body is not an independent physical space to be controlled and crushed into the straitjacket of social decorum: it is a weapon, to be used in the entire network of discourses that interact in the social: discourses which were becoming increasingly cognizant of both conscious and unconscious definitions of subjectivity.

Thus, while Burgh's text conforms to the general trend of legislative theories which attempt to control the excessive language of the body and to restrict its physical movement, in constructing such a forceful taxonomy he produces the excess which cannot be controlled, and brings into the discourse of legislation the unruly and as yet unmasterable interior of the subject. Where the orator may wish to appear distant and proper, correct and controlled, the spectator may detect, by dint of his or her practice in reading the signs of the body, the writing

<sup>20</sup> This is certainly the case as regards the practice of reading and tells us something about the eighteenth-century erotics of the reading activity as well as our own fetishization of the text. These comments will be expanded upon in the last two chapters.

of desire, the expression of guilt, the admission of defeat. While the primary purpose of Burgh's book is to instruct the pupil in the ways and means of disguising this embarrassing writing of the 'other', it precisely opens up the objection that such deceit is untrue to nature, improper, and to be guarded against at all costs. It is only when the subject is allowed its interior, its internal existence, that such a discrepancy between outward show and inner sensation becomes significant.

The elocutionary movement, then, arises at precisely this juncture, when the physical space of the body and its spacings within the social are coming under more and more precise classification and legislation. The voice, as the counter-text to the body, complements this classificatory project, but it also attains considerable power as the means by which social and political identities are articulated. This recognition of the cultural or class-based indices exposed by and in the voice was hardly new; however the uses to which this is put by the elocutionary movement reinforce the pressure on the subject, and paradoxically effect the transformation from the subject as/in voice to the subject as/in text. Thus, while it is the power of the voice that determines one's standing in society, and the power of the English voice that secures the nation's standing in the world, it is the power of the subject as text, as self-authenticating which increasingly comes to determine that voice.

Sheridan, the major exponent of the movement, spends his career exploiting the discrepancy between the old forms of public speech determined by the rules of proper behaviour and dictated by polite and decorous society, those rules which until now had constituted the self, and the new kinds of self-assertion which resulted from the elocutionists' insistence on the right of every speaker to his or her own voice, determined by an inner, coherent and consistent subjectivity. Sheridan is far from clear about the political ramifications of this discrepancy, wavering between democratic populist philosopher and speech master to the aspiring ruling class. However, the intervention signalled by his lecture tours and writings is of major importance which I shall draw out by focusing on Sheridan's obsession with the consequences of the phrase 'to make one's own': this should indicate the proximity of Sheridan's obsession to our own, the property and propriety of the subject.

One further contextual marker is required in order to situate Sheridan's work on elocution, and this concerns the pressure we have already seen in the discussion on the National Debt to create a national identity.<sup>21</sup> It is not accidental that Sheridan's work on the English language begins during the period of renewed national crisis. The entry into the war with France merely

<sup>21</sup> It is also noteworthy that criticism of the government during the war had, from some quarters, centred on the king's inability to speak English. See *Theatrical Review*, Feb. 1763, pp. 50 ff. Sheridan's interest in teaching 'court English' takes on rather different associations when seen from this angle.

reanimated a longstanding contestation over the 'purity' of English: whether English should take within itself fashionable French terms or, alternatively, expel them. It also raised the ghost of a closer and more deeply felt schism within the emergent national consciousness, that of the Scottish threat, still only ten or so years past when Sheridan begins his work on elocution with a consideration of British educational practice.

Schooling during Sheridan's youth paid little or no attention to the skills of reading and writing English. This was the direct result of an educational system based on and in Latin.<sup>22</sup> Although Sheridan was far from the first person to advocate the use of English in schools,<sup>23</sup> his series of popular lectures during the 1760s, in England, Scotland and Ireland, focused attention on the problem of a national language with renewed vigour, a topic which, as John Barrrell points out, was a frequent theme during the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Sheridan's aims, therefore, were not merely the reform of teaching in schools, but the production and securing of a unified nation state:

... if such a Grammar and Dictionary were published, they must soon be adopted into use by all schools professing to teach English. The consequence of teaching children by one method, and one uniform system of rules, would be an uniformity of pronunciation in all so instructed. Thus might the rising generation, born and bred in different Countries and Counties, no longer have a variety of dialects, but as subjects of one King, like sons of one father, have one common tongue.<sup>25</sup>

The unified state is the political reflection of the public production of the unified subject – the sons of one father – and it is the relations between the public and private, between the subject as the authentic place of speech, and the nation as the authentic place of representation for the individual; between the individual and the state, that will concern us in the following.

<sup>22</sup> The dissenting academies, where teaching took place in English, became increasingly active and important during this period, the most visible amongst them being Warrington where Priestley, Aikin, and Enfield all taught. For a history of education and non-conformism in England during the eighteenth century, see: I. Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England*, (Cambridge, 1914); J. W. Ashley Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education: The Contribution of the Dissenting Academies 1660–1800* (London, 1954); N. Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century*, (London 1951); Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education 1780–1870* (London, 1960); Richard S. Thompson, *Classics or Charity? The Dilemma of Eighteenth Century Grammar Schools* (Manchester, 1931); and H. Maclachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts* (Manchester, 1931).

<sup>23</sup> Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* of 1570 is the first tract on education to be published in English, but it is Locke who presented the firmest case for adopting the English language as the standard in schools. See *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (Cambridge, 1899), p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> John Barrrell, *English Literature in History 1730–80. An Equal Wide Survey* (London, 1983), p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *A Dissertation on the causes of the difficulties which occur in learning the English tongue. With a scheme for publishing an English grammar and dictionary upon a plan entirely new* (London, 1762), p. 36.

The obsession with 'making one's own' has profound ramifications in political terms, which can be seen in Sheridan's most clear-cut statements about the relations between oratory and the health of the constitution. The close of Book One of *British Education* puts it in the following manner:

The principal point in view was to prove, that some of the greatest evils in the state arose from a defective education. In order to do this it has been laid down as a maxim, that no state can thrive unless the education of youth be suited to its principle. It has been endeavoured to be proved, that no principle could possibly support our constitution but that of religion; and it has been shown, that religion cannot be upheld without skill in oratory, in its ministers. It has been shown also, that the knowledge of that art is equally necessary in those who compose the legislative body, and are consequently the guardians of the state. So far therefore as the support of its principle is necessary to the preservation of the state, and so far as a proper discharge of their duty in its guardians is necessary to its safety, so far is the study of oratory essential to the very being of the British constitution.<sup>26</sup>

The message is clear: unhealthy habits in speech, and lack of skill in oration both reflect and produce an unhealthy state. Worse than this, if education in the English language is neglected the language will fall into degeneration, a condition that will inevitably result in social disorder and political chaos. The role of education, according to this account, is to help fix and codify the language, so that each individual can both speak and be moved by a common tongue: all of this, of course, in the interests of fixing and stabilizing a national identity, of placing the representation of self within the context of the greater whole, the nation. From here it is but a mere short step to the welding of the image of self to national self-image.

Sheridan is clear about this when he refers explicitly to the classical nation-states who cultivated their language to the utmost perfection: if Britain is to rise to and maintain a position of power and superiority over other countries it too must refine and cultivate its language.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen, a war with France is

<sup>26</sup> Sheridan, *British Education: or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain* (London, 1756), pp. 173–4.

<sup>27</sup> This analogy between classical times and the present is one facet of an increasing historical imperative within the theories discussed in this chapter. To be aware of the English language is, of necessity, to become aware of a specific history, and, therefore, to recognize the need for a language of history which would adequately represent the history of the language. This is more complex than one might suspect, since the very notion of an historical mode of knowledge as present to the subject is itself extremely problematic: how can the subject understand itself as part of the historicizing process, yet remain to itself a coherent and consistent site of its own historical knowledge? This is one of the questions brought into sharp focus by the discourse of the sublime, since our conceptualization of that discourse necessitates a refusal of historicization, at least as understood in the linear progression of the march of history: the discourse of the sublime is first and foremost a transformative discourse, its own modes of historical ordering are clearly not chronological or linear. On account of this, should the subject be represented under the sign of this discourse, the subject's own history is marked by these particular modes of (non) historical ordering.

more than a war over commerce and capital, it also involves the state and health of the language, its purity and power to resist outside influence; more than this, however, it concerns national identity.

Yet Sheridan's aims are not entirely circumscribed by this jingoistic refusal of foreign languages; his interest in the foundation and origins of language, in *homo loquens*, broadens this quite common eighteenth-century pronationalist concern into an examination of the propriety of speech.<sup>28</sup> This becomes a topic in the second book of *British Education* where Sheridan quotes Locke in support of his argument:

To speak or write better *Latin* than *English* may make a Man be talk'd of, but he will find it more to his Purpose to express himself well in his own Tongue; that he uses every Moment, than to have the vain Commendation of others for a very insignificant Quality. This I find universally neglected, nor no Care taken any where to improve young Men in their own Language, that they may thoroughly understand and be Masters of it. If any one among us have a Facility or Purity more than ordinary in his Mother Tongue, it is owing to Chance, or his Genius, or any thing, rather than to his Education, or any Care of his Teacher. [197-8]

It is not only a question of national pride that one speak English, there is also the question of one's *natural* language, and extended from this an inquiry into the 'naturalness' of the language spoken by any one individual: its fittingness to a particular person or property of a specific personality. The reasons for speaking English are, therefore, not only determined by being born in England, they are also founded upon a notion of a language as given or proper to each person: one speaks English because it is a language that one feels to be *one's own*. Because of this, when one reads the words of another person, for example, great effort should be made to ensure that one speaks in *propria voce*, that one appropriates the text to oneself.

Sheridan's ideas about the practice of reading will be discussed in detail in chapter 10, where the relations between the theory and practice of reading are explored. For the present argument we should note that exterior speech, the speech of the orator, should to all intents and purposes represent the interior: public and private voice should be made identical. In the fourth lecture on elocution he advises:

I would therefore recommend it to every one, who has any thing to read or recite in public, to reflect in what manner and with what kind of emphasis, he would point out the meaning, if he were to deliver those words, as proceeding from the immediate sentiments of his own mind. With this point in view he can not fail of finding out the words, on which, in that case, he would lay the emphasis.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Albert C. Baugh, *A History of the English Language*, 2nd edn, rev. (London, 1959), pp. 317-26 for a discussion of this.

<sup>29</sup> Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London, 1762), p. 71.

The text must become internalized, thereby turning the dead text into living speech; more than this, however, the voice itself becomes a text for the audience, for it is emphasis that communicates the correct or proper meaning. This textualization is a kind of healing process, in which the exterior textual matter is assimilated within the interior sentiments of the mind of the orator, who then expresses the combined text/internal sentiment in a soothing manner.<sup>30</sup> The result of this is for Sheridan to recognize the need for an absolute identity between the public and private in order to forestall the possibility of a split subject – one who reads another's words with an emphasis neither proper to the text nor proper to himself. The split within the subject may take place about the dividing line, or bar, of consciousness, that which enables the speaker to distinguish between his 'intentions' in his emphatic vocalization and his 'unconscious' slavish following of the text's own intent. In order to prevent this from happening, inner private voice must be exactly and fully translated into outer public text.

Thus, in the seventh lecture Sheridan points out the folly of maintaining a belief in the split between a private inner subject and a public outer:

But a case may be put, that supposing a man has, by indulging early bad habits, or from any other cause, acquired a manner of delivery in private life, and in his usual discourse, very disagreeable and disgusting: supposing he should have a habit of distorting his features, of using awkward and extravagant gestures, and uttering strange and discordant tones; is he not in such a case, to endeavour to get the better of these, whenever he speaks in public, and consequently to avoid that manner, which from habit, may be called his natural one? My answer is, that if he thinks of reforming this only in public, he begins at the wrong end, and will never be able to effect what he desires. His business is, to set about a reformation of all such faults, first, in private life: if by his own attention to it, and the constant information of his friends, he should get the better of them there, of course he will be without them also in public. [131]

One should take care to control and monitor one's own speech, to express only those sentiments and passions intended; hence the elocutionist's zeal in educating people to speak 'properly'. However, Sheridan's text is cognizant of

<sup>30</sup> The full awareness of speech as cure is brought out in the following comment: 'Rhetoric is somewhat more happy in its designs than Poetry, and of whatever crimes Orators stand accused, I find them much more innocent than Poets: For as their principal end is to persuade truth, they are constrained to employ all artifices for combating the Passions contrary to it, and it seems that in acquitting themselves of their duty, they perform also that of a Physician, and cure their Auditors of all their maladies. They appease their anger if too much irritated, they raise their courage if too much dejected, they make love succeed to hatred, pity to revenge, and repressing one emotion by another, bring forth tranquillity out of the Storm. . . . But Orators, whose design is to take possession of the mind by the senses, unite the elegance of expression with sound reasons, flatter the ear for touching the heart, and adopt the force of figurative speech to move the affections; they attack the two parts that compose man, making use of the weaker for prevailing against the stronger, and as the Devil destroyed man by means of the woman, they win over reason by the means of Passion.' *The Philosophy of the Passions*, pp. 169-70.

another, yet more powerful, analysis of the voice which breaks through at certain points. It is this adjacent description of the power of the voice that I take to be Sheridan's important contribution to our topic, and which marks his distance from mainstream eighteenth-century rhetorical theory.<sup>31</sup> We can approach this adjacency by noticing once again the disturbance in the analytic description, and the identification of an excess or surplus that falls outside the domain of legislation.

We have already seen, in fact, one facet of this process in the comments on the guardians of the state who, it is implied, 'discharge their duty' by studying and perfecting oratory, something which is, furthermore, necessary for the very 'being of the British constitution'.<sup>32</sup> The complexities of this 'discharge' are exemplified in the following passage:

The best rule for a speaker to observe is, never to utter a greater quantity of voice, than he can afford without pain to himself, or any extraordinary effort. Whilst he does this, the other organs of speech will be at liberty to discharge their several offices with ease; and he will always have his voice under command. But whenever he transgresses these bounds, he gives up the reins, and has no longer any management of it. And it will ever be the safest way too, to keep within his compass, rather than go at any time to the utmost extent of it; which is a dangerous experiment, and never justifiable but upon some extraordinary emotion. [85]

This is a remarkable example of a discursive node, a network of differing discourses held together in order to stabilize the relationship between voice and self. In this case the node defines the place for the subject even as Sheridan attempts to limit its power and keep it within his command. I take it that this is clear from the topic under discussion – the loss of self-control – as much as from lack of control manifest by and within the description. This network does not resemble a layered table or a latticework of discourses siting one on top of the other with little or no friction between layers. Rather, we have in front of us a knot, a tangled web of interpenetrating discourses, with terms and expressions, tropes and quotations gathered consciously and half-consciously from a resonating, active discursive network. I shall argue, it will come as no surprise, that this knot produces an overplus, the discharge with which we began our identification, and that that surplus is most usefully seen in terms of the production of the self-determining social and political subject.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The best introduction to eighteenth-century rhetoric is Howell, *Eighteenth Century British Logic and Rhetoric*.

<sup>32</sup> See above p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> This surplus is generally dispersed in later elocutionary theory so that the notion of the internally coherent and consistent subject is less of an issue. The small tract entitled *Thoughts on elocution* (London, 1798) presumes that the notion of ownership of self is entirely unproblematic, claiming that 'he that speaks well, must not only have a correct and comprehensive view of the subject, but acquire a very high degree of self-possession', p. 14.

We could begin simply by noting some of the words that are used: the discourse of economy is clearly present in 'quantity', 'afford', 'management', 'legal discourse is represented by 'command', 'transgress these bounds', 'political in 'offices', and 'liberty', while a sheen of possible sexual innuendo pervades the entire citation generated, perhaps, by the phrases 'discharge it with ease', 'Keep within compass' and 'go to the utmost extent'. This catalogue of lexical items and their connotations hardly describes the complexity of figural usage, nor indeed does it begin to explain the ways in which the overplus is foreclosed. For, as I hope to demonstrate, there is a continual pressure within Sheridan's discourse to contain what is manifestly uncontainable, coupled with a recognition of its inability to contain what it knows itself to have produced, the surplus or overplus discussed below.

One might want to object that what we have identified as a discursive production of excess is in fact little more than infelicitous expression, awkwardness or poor command of language, for that is certainly what it looks like at first glance, but that would be to ignore one of the most interesting discursive knots, or distribution of different discourses we have come across so far. The first sentence, for example, is syntactically awkward in its placement of the last phrase, which would have been more at home had it followed 'quantity of voice'. As it stands it gives the impression of a sentence that is not complete without the last phrase, the addition of which looks as if it is a second thought: precisely the result of the preceding sentence which has thrown up the qualifying awkward addition. By placing this phrase at the end the stricture that one never cause pain to oneself is decreased in force considerably, since the last qualification states that one should not even make any 'extraordinary effort' when speaking. This accords with the rules we have already noted, which instruct the speaker to practise disguising or minimizing any signs of effort that may be made apparent to his listeners during an oration. However, if we take Sheridan's comments as primarily concerned with the display of the self, the public appearance of any individual in society – precisely a concern with how other individuals see oneself – then we should read 'voice' metonymically, as standing for self. I take such a reading as the underrow of the entire paragraph, which is less interested in the voice *per se*, than in what that voice indicates and what it stands for. Read like this the stricture can be taken as saying that the subject should become manifest without any effort, as if it should appear merely as an effect of speech, not as its result.

This point is worth dwelling upon, because the distinction to be made between subjectivity as a product of discourse on the one hand, and as an effect of it on the other, is of some concern to Sheridan. In the first instance subjectivity can be seen as resulting from efforts made by the subject, not a paradoxical situation when one considers the range of contexts in which we understand the term 'subject': here 'subjectivity' can be read as social persona, the outward mark of the presence of an individual; precisely the mark that others take as indicative of



self in contrast to subjectivity as the internal indicator of the presence of self to the self – what we would call consciousness or perhaps more correctly consciousness of self. The account of subjectivity as product is based on a notion of self-projection, as if the internal subject strives to give as good an impression as possible to the others who constitute society. It suggests that one might make oneself in discourse.

The second account, on the other hand, suggests that subjectivity is no more than a leakage, something which just happens to appear in certain discursive forms and operations; it is less a property of the individual than a function of specific discursive situations. In this case one should not appear to be trying; in order to present oneself in the best possible light to others one should not be seen to be making any perceptible effort. Sheridan does not hold one of these views to the exclusion of the other, and indeed it would be absurd to think of him as doing so. For it is precisely the undecidable nature of this question, about the provenance of the subject, that produces the tension we are here examining.

This tension can be detected in the first sentence of the paragraph in the discrepancy between the conservation of 'voice', that 'quantity' held within the human frame, a part of subjectivity, and its expense, that emission of vocal sound, which signals the presence of the individual to itself and in society. A dilemma occurs then in which the speaker must decide between conserving what he takes to be his 'essence' or the foundation of his subjectivity, and expending as much of this 'stock' as possible, without causing negative effects – pain to the interior self. He must make such exertions in order to insert his person within the exterior world, within the social where speech stands for person. It should be underlined that this dilemma can only arise if a prior notion of the absolute split between interior and exterior, of the distances between the public person and the interior private subject is present. In other words, one must have a working notion of the 'self' as a quantum, a space, or a concept in order to effect such distinctions.<sup>34</sup>

The second sentence outlines a second set of tensions which can be located in the slippage from the 'he' who performs without 'extraordinary effort' and the 'organs of speech' which, as if by their own volition, 'discharge their several offices with ease'. This suggests that there are at least two subjects at work, the one that is identified with consciousness, with the subject as both originator of

and responsible for action, and the other with a bundle of motor action, of stimulus and response: a mechanism that acts according to the rules which govern its operation. However, as we should note, these 'other organs' are given considerable status in the economy of this subject, since they have 'offices' which, we impute, they *must* or have to 'discharge'. Furthermore, the last clause of the sentence adds even greater complexity in suggesting that the voice should come under his 'command'. Consequently, if the voice can act on its own account, can be unruly in relation to the subject, then a split within subjectivity must exist. Such an account is at odds with a previous analysis of the voice, which, we may recall described the subject as produced by, or represented in, the voice. Who or what, then, can control that which produces the means for self-control?

The crux, however, comes hard on the heels of this potentially disruptive question – suggesting as it does a split in consciousness – when, in the following sentence, 'he' suddenly becomes identified with 'the voice'. For, 'these bounds' in 'whenever he transgresses these bounds' must, at least according to the sense, refer to the 'best rule' of the first sentence. However, its position contiguous to the previous sentence strenuously suggests that it is the voice which 'transgresses', which slips out from the subject's 'command'. Again, it is the voice that he 'no longer has any management of', but being placed in the same sentence as the 'transgression of bounds', here understood as the subject's transgression of bounds, a considerable pressure is brought to bear on conjoining the two, so that 'it' no longer uniquely refers to voice: it may well equally refer to the subject. This would seem to lead to a reading of the subject in terms of an excess or surplus, where the self transgresses the bounds which legislate its production and control its performance.

We are here doing little more than tracing the slippage between antecedents for 'it', a grammatical instability which is certainly compounded by the sentence following, where 'it' occurs twice. On its second use the grammatical sense is clear: 'it' refers to 'compass'. But, what does 'keep within his compass' mean? Surely the sense demands that we read 'self or perhaps 'bound of subjectivity' for compass, and therefore that 'it' refers to the subject. This again demonstrates the indecision concerning voice and the self, for if we read this sentence as referring primarily to the voice, then 'it' becomes far less problematic making the sense closer to: it will be the safest way to keep within the limits of the voice, rather than going to the full extent. In other words, the subject 'reins in' the voice, which is what we might expect. It is of course in the nature of such a complex web of reference that precisely the opposite meaning is generated in which the subject is seen as reined in by the correct decorum of the voice.

I take it that in tracing the imprecision of this passage, in attending to its slippages, we are noting the disturbance of the discourse: what I have also termed the eruption of the subject, the subject position within a discursive analytic. There is, however, more than the right to self-determination of the subject at

<sup>34</sup> This notion of the self is, as we have noted, the result of Kames's textual analysis of the sublime. The terms being used here by Sheridan are so close to those used by Kames in the footnote discussed at length in ch. 3 that comment seems to be required. Where Kames insists on 'going to the limit' Sheridan claims this to be a dangerous experiment: where Kames proclaims the necessity of an aesthetics of infinite quantity, Sheridan prefers the more domesticated finite. Where Kames embraces pain, Sheridan avoids it at all costs. We are here comparing rhetorical orderings, since the topics under discussion in these two texts are clearly distinct from each other.

stake, which becomes clearer if we re-insert this practical guide to correct oratorical performance within its larger discursive context.

Returning to the texture of the language, its use of different idiom and its imprecision of syntax, we can observe an underpinning of reference to the political, or the public positioning of the subject. Let us read very strongly in between the first sentences, for example. If the private individual takes care to restrain his voice, to keep it within the bounds of decorum, of the proper management of *person*, then he will enable the 'other organs of speech', which is to say the public realm of voice, to voice out loud precisely that speech which speaks for all people – government – and to 'discharge their several offices with ease'. The meaning is clear: if one acts according to the correct rules of personal and private behaviour then the social and the political, the public realm of the individual, will function correctly and all subjects will remain at, or within liberty. The sentiment is, of course, immediately recognizable as one of the controlling tropes of eighteenth-century social theory: it signals the consensus politics of liberal humanism, the balanced economy of civic politesse.

If we continue reading our passage within the domain of social theory and pass on to the next sentence, in which there is a warning against the malfunction of the private voice caused by the individual's transgression of the rules of polite conduct, this vocal maladjustment will, it is suggested, result in chaos, in public disequilibrium. Again, the sentiment is fully at home in the consensus politics of mid-century, but if we detect a note of tension or of disquiet to these barely submerged comments it is because of the related and tied discourses within which the discourse of politics is entangled, on account of the complexity of the discursive knot. 'Discharge', for example, is a loaded term: one discharges a debt or a moral obligation, and both these senses are activated within the passage. For it is both government's obligation to act in the public interest, and its duty to discharge its debt to the individuals upon whose consent it is allowed to govern. This notion of the individual's participation within the social and political is commonly associated with Locke's theory of government, which attempts to explain and stabilize the positioning of sovereignty within the people, those individuals who make up society, against a siting of the ultimate power in the place of the sovereign and strenuously tied to his or her physical body. The use of this notion of consent as the sub-text of Sheridan's argument is, of course, nothing but a political gesture: to motion toward the 'government by consent' argument is not the same thing as putting it into practice, nor even the same thing as desiring it. Again, my reading suggests that this is a powerful figuration at work across a number of mid-century discursive fields: its relations to the 'real' of the period are extremely complex and a matter of intense ideological struggle.<sup>35</sup> Here in Sheridan's analysis, the gesture towards 'consent' or 'contractual government' is a legislating manoeuvre, a defusing and refusing of the excess: as he coyly puts it one should never 'go at any time to the utmost extent of it'. Having said this, the 'discharge', read in another way, can be seen as

precisely the excess, the result of having gone too far, the overplus of the individual's private conduct: it is for this reason that the tension and friction we have noted within this exemplary discursive knot arises.

All the above is really little more than close reading; a mode of attention to the text that, in this instance at least, constantly threatens to exceed the proper bounds of textual explication. One might, for example, want to retort to this strained and fanciful reading that Sheridan was simply unsure of what he wanted to say, or careless, or that he simply did not care. But it seems to me that even more can be read from this passage by placing it next to another text to make the point even more strongly.

Sheridan's lectures on elocution, in common with all his work on language, insist on the primacy of speech, on the absolute power of the voice. This, not surprisingly, could be said to be the determining characteristic of the elocutionary movement. However, the political implications of this movement are far from clear-cut, for the most obvious connections between the power of speech and political republicanism may not necessarily pertain: Sheridan could equally well have been arguing for the opposite political ends, for the greater distancing between those who had voice, in political terms, effected through their practice and attention to correct speech, and those who did not. It is, therefore, instructive to place next to Sheridan's comments another contemporary account of the place of speech, this one in fact proposed by a 'radical' in eighteenth-century terms, a dissenter and theorist of considerable note, Joseph Priestley.

The preface to Priestley's *The Rudiments of English Grammar; adapted to the use of schools* sets out a common position on the role of grammar in relation to the spoken language. Priestley writes:

*Grammar* may be compared to a treatise of *Natural Philosophy*: the one consisting of observations on the various changes, combinations, and mutual affections of words; and the other of the parts of nature: and were the language of men as uniform as the works of nature, the *grammar of language* would be as indisputable in its principles as the *grammar of nature*: but since good authors have adopted different forms of speech, and in case that admits of no standard but that of *custom*, one authority may be of as much weight as another.

<sup>35</sup> Sheridan is as much used by as he is using this figure. The force of the Lockean argument can be traced at the level of figuration far more readily than at the level of the 'real'. In his book *English Society 1688–1732* (Cambridge, 1985) J.C.D. Clark argues the case that Locke was not a major or influential figure for the early eighteenth-century political debate about the constitution: see pp. 45–51. Clark's comments are based within his very limited area of interest – the debates conducted by politicians and political theorists in the first decades of the century, and are useful in dispelling the myth of a widespread acceptance of the Lockean contractual system of government. However, this, I think, does not mean that the idea of 'consent' was not figuratively active in mid-century discourses: its use as a trope may disfigure those discourses so that we may unwarily read the figuration for the 'real', but this does not deny the presence of the trope, it merely tells us that history is as much about figuration as about event, a point which does not seem productive in Clarke's 'readings'.

The *analogy of language* is the only thing to which we can have recourse, to adjust these differences; for language, to answer the intent of it, which is to express our thought with certainty in an intercourse with one another, must be fixed and consistent with itself.<sup>36</sup>

The problem is a familiar one in eighteenth-century discussions of language: if custom dictates usage who dictates custom?<sup>37</sup> Who or what legislates between different uses, different users of the language? It is clear that this is a political problem as much as a linguistic one, a fact that is disguised to a very small extent, and is brought out by Priestley's concluding remarks to his preface on the possibility of founding a public academy on similar grounds to the French Academy: 'As to a publick *Academy*, invested with authority to ascertain the use of words, which is a project that some persons are very sanguine in their expectations from, I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a *free nation*, but in itself ill calculated to reform and fix a language' [vii]. The connections between the state of the language and the health of the nation have already been remarked upon in passing – the figure was a commonplace – it is precisely the power and persistence of this trope to which I wish to draw attention, for it would seem that the link between the state of the language and the state of the nation was almost unquestionably accepted during mid-century by both theorists of language and theorists of government, no matter what their political position. This trope determines the description of a free nation as that in which its subjects use a free language, a language based on custom, not on prescriptive rules. Priestley's arguments concerning this proposition are more complex than the standard line, which is best illustrated by Johnson's comments upon the establishment of a 'watch-dog' academy,<sup>38</sup> and have been discussed in detail by John Barrell.<sup>39</sup> I will not repeat those arguments here, preferring to concentrate on another aspect of this complicated figuration which articulates politics and language, in order to highlight Priestley's divergence from Sheridan.

This slightly different focus concerns the distance between spoken and written language. As we have already seen, Sheridan's entire project is based in and on speech, within those rules governing the correct use of language and the proper expressions and gestures which should accompany it, so that the exterior sound of the voice and movement of the body reflect as closely as possible the interior sensations and passions felt by the speaker. This project recognizes that it is founded upon the unification of spoken exterior sound, social reality, with

unspoken interior consciousness, and it is precisely that conjunction which disturbs Sheridan's discourse in its implications for the site of subjectivity. Hence the weighting between text and voice is of crucial importance, since texts may either provide the pretext for the outward display and demonstration of the subject, may give the context for the voice, or, alternatively, they may threaten the subject in their resistance to appropriation and their functioning as the residue of past and absent subjects. The text, on the one hand, may be the score from which the voice takes its cue and upon which it weaves its many improvisations of self, or, on the other, may be the graphic trace of another subject, the marks of a prior subjectivity that demand antagonistic confrontation as the voice struggles to master the text.

It is instructive, then, that Sheridan holds that written texts should give as accurately as possible the indications for their vocalization, for their correct speech. In fact he evolved a system of writing that used a set of diacritical marks to indicate the manner in which the text should be brought into speech. These marks sign-posted emphasis, where the voice should be lowered or raised, the length of pause between words and indicated the pitch at which various words should be spoken. *The Art of Reading* provides the most extended example of this kind of text, and presents a large number of examples for practice.<sup>40</sup> For Sheridan it is clear that the text required the addition of the voice, without it texts remain inert, dead, and without power. Priestley, on the other hand, takes precisely the opposite view on this matter, claiming:

The use of writing, as of speaking, is to express our thoughts with certainty and perspicuity. But as *writing* is a permanent thing, it is requisite that *written* forms of speech have a greater degree of precision and perspicuity than is necessary in *colloquial* forms, or such as very well answer the purpose of common conversation.<sup>41</sup>

Thus far Sheridan might have agreed: writing should indeed take great pains to convey as precisely as possible the matter to hand. Priestley continues:

It is *writing* that fixes, and gives stability to a language: for hardly any of the causes that contribute to the revolutions of *vocal* language do at all affect that which is *written* . . . . . since, according to the order of nature, *words* are but subordinate and subservient to *things*: the chief use of written language must be to record, extend, and perpetuate, useful knowledge: that, unless our whole view in writing be to please the ear and imagination, by beautiful description, and harmonious diction, we ought rather to aim at perspicuity and strength of expression, than exactness in the punctilios of composition: [60, 61]

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Priestley, *The Rudiments of English grammar; adapted to the use of schools. With observations on Style* (London, 1761), p. vi.

<sup>37</sup> For the most useful discussion of this topic see Barrell, *An Equal Wide Survey*, pp. 110–75.

<sup>38</sup> See Johnson's preface to the Dictionary, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> See *An Equal Wide Survey*, pp. 161–5.

<sup>40</sup> Sheridan's graphic scheme was not the only one to have been proposed, but it suffered the same fate as all the others: extremely rapid obsolescence.

<sup>41</sup> Priestley, *The Rudiments of English Grammar*, p. 45. Lindley Murray follows this emphasis in his *English Grammar* (York, 1795). See especially his 'Appendix: containing Rules and Observations for promoting Perspicuity in Speaking and Writing.'

We might want to begin by drawing a comparison between Priestley's conception of the individual's participation within the social and political and Sheridan's, and to note that Priestley's is more complex than Sheridan's. It is on this account that he cannot ignore the powerful role played by writing in the distribution of the democratic 'free' rights of the individual. To be able to speak correctly is one thing, but to be able to be heard is another, and to be allowed to present oneself in writing still another.<sup>42</sup>

It is not coincidental that Priestley, a dissenter who spent the years during which these works on language were published teaching at Warrington Academy, should have had a more complex view of the interrelation between speech and writing than Sheridan, one-time friend of Johnson and recipient of a state pension, since his own experience of the distribution of 'free speech' was marked by a profound recognition of the inequality perpetrated in its name. For Priestley, it was not enough to learn to speak correctly, for the power of language is cumulative, and the only way in which one has access to the past power of that language is through reading, and the only way in which one can make powerful speech in the present felt in the future is by writing.

For these reasons and more Priestley wants to maintain the power of the voice, while tempering it with the recognition of the complementary power of writing: Amazing as is the power and advantage of *speech* for the communication of ideas, it is, in several respects, infinitely inferior to the art of *Writing*. Since by the one the power of communication is confined both in point of time and place, and in the other it is absolutely unconfined with respect to both.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the use of writing:

... connects, as it were, the living, the dead, and the unborn: for, by writing, the present age can not only receive information from the greatest and the wisest of mankind before them, but are themselves able to convey wisdom and instruction to the latest posterity. [22]

This statement about the efficacy of writing then doubles back upon itself in Priestley's concluding remarks where he states that 'notwithstanding the superiority of writing to speaking in the above mentioned respects, it is but a substitute for the art of speaking; and, where both can be used, vastly inferior to it' [22]. The aural reality of the voice takes precedence over the written text, but it should not be studied to the exclusion of writing. Priestley's teaching at

<sup>42</sup> I mean to refer to the rules and regulations determining the submission of petitions to parliament which were frequently dismissed during the period 1797–1818 on account of their language. The reasons for this are discussed by Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791–1819* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 30–4. It seems unlikely that the written was any less restrictively defined for the period under discussion here.

<sup>43</sup> Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar* (Warrington, 1762), p. 21.

Warrington followed this precept by requiring students to practise writing not only prose but poetry as well.<sup>44</sup>

We should pause here in order to consider the different priorities that are being articulated by Priestley, who has a far greater sense of the work needed in order to breach the fierce social discrimination practised by mainstream eighteenth-century polite society on the mass of the people who occupied its margins. Where Sheridan happily claims to be teaching people 'court English', Priestley introduces a full teaching programme in English, as well as teaching pupils to speak correctly and write with perspicuity. Sheridan's following comments from his *Rhetorical Grammar* can be interpreted in one sense as democratic:

Mankind must *speak* from the beginning, therefore ought, from the beginning be taught to *speak rightly*; else they might acquire a habit of speaking *wrong*... There is a great difference between *speaking* and *writing*. Some, nay most of mankind, are never to be *writers*. All are *speakers*. Young persons ought not to be put upon writing (from their own *funds*, I mean) till they have furnished their minds with *thoughts*, that is, till they have got *funds*: but they cannot be kept from speaking.<sup>45</sup>

However, in another sense they can be read as repressive, restricting the domain of writing to those who can 'afford' it. Thus, where Sheridan's populist endeavours have a double edge, bringing more people into the realm of polite discourse while neglecting to provide instruction in, and thus providing the possibility for, written expression, thereby maintaining the distance between governors and governed, Priestley's more traditional or regressive insistence on the need and use of writing reflects a radical intervention into a society which made class distinctions all the time by operating the very common means of oppression grouped together under the name of literacy. This latter is hardly news, of course, but to pitch the populist elocutionist next to the radical dissenter in this crucial area of the politics of reading and writing, speaking and being spoken for, brings into a different light some of the contours that distinguish the various discourses under discussion.

Returning to the initiating impulse which gave rise to this comparison – the nature of the excess in relation to private and public conduct – we can note that Priestley wavers in his opinion concerning the differences between speech and text, and we can discern a certain questioning of the ideologies of the subject at work in this indecision. To claim with Sheridan that speech takes precedence

<sup>44</sup> Priestley maintained, in fact, that students improved their prose writing by practising writing verse.

<sup>45</sup> Sheridan, *A rhetorical grammar*, p. 158. These comments are taken, without acknowledgment, from James Burgh, 'An Essay on the Art of Speaking', presented by Sheridan as 'On Public Speaking'.

over text is to make the identification between voice and subject explicit and to weld together social persona with internal person: it is to effect an erasure of the tension at work in more psychological theories of the self, and to place the legislation of subjectivity within the domain of polite society. Whereas to claim the opposite, or at least to countenance the possibility of the opposite, as I have suggested is the case for Priestley, is to textualize the subject, to suggest that subjectivity can be read and interpreted like a text, and that there may be a distance between social spoken effects of person and interior consciousness: an opening between the subject as spontaneous production of social discourse and subjectivity as persistence, as a collection of individual moments, memories, and experiences that are constituted more like a written text than a spoken utterance.

If we allow this description of the subject position in terms of textualization it follows, fairly obviously I think, that it requires a very different set of legislative discourses and instruments of policing to restrict both the activities of the subject in society and the propriety of the text. It is also this recognition of the possibility of the textualization of the subject which makes a textual jurisprudence, among many other things, necessary.<sup>46</sup> For, if the subject becomes textualized the law must not only bring the subject under its legislation, it must also bring the subject-as-text to law. When the legal code itself becomes another text, places itself within textuality, various difficulties emerge around the boundary of 'the law'. The kind of problem we find here concerns the multiform ways in which a legal code *as text* operates in relation to its own textuality: how does the law write itself when the law is that writing? These larger questions need not interrupt the discussion to any great extent: we need only to note that when both the law which legislates the practice of the subject and the subject itself are textualized a complex knot of intertextual relations results.

This very brief discussion of the common ground between the law and elocutionary theory is characterized by the location of a shared figuration: the transformation from a voice-centred to a text-centred discursivity, from a description of the subject in terms of voice to one in terms of the text. It would seem to be evident that this change refracts and reflects the more generally deployed tactics of conversion from voice to text throughout the ordering of discourses during the period immediately following the Seven Years War. It also seems apparent that we are nearing the position from where the excess produced by textuality on the one hand and the identification of an autonomous subject on the other can be seen as coincident. This connection will become increasingly visible, but before we discuss further examples it is necessary to

<sup>46</sup> It is useful to remember that exactly coincident with these theories of speech and writing is the publication of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, and that the first book, 'On The Rights of Persons', insists on the distinction between the public and the private, the rights of persons and the rights of things. See William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the laws of England* (London, 1765–1769), I, p. 118.

follow through the implications of this transformation from a predominating figure of voice to that of text.<sup>47</sup>

This brings us back to the starting point of this chapter, and to the legislation of the body in speech: the textualization of the body is the point of contact between a consensus politics of speech and a radical politics of writing. As we have already noted the body is constituted as a text to be read in the oratorical performance, it figures forth, via gesture and movement, the subject in the text it performs. It also brings into public space, into 'the real', the subject of the orator, no matter how much he tries to erase his own person in the face of the text. There are, because of this, 'two languages' at work in public speaking according to Sheridan:

The one is, the language of ideas; by which the thoughts which pass in a man's mind, are manifested to others; and this language is composed chiefly of words properly ranged, and divided into sentences. The other, is the language of emotions; by which the effects that those thoughts have upon the mind of the speaker, in exciting the passions, affections, and all manner of feelings, are not only made known, but communicated to others; and this language is composed of tones, looks, and gesture.<sup>48</sup>

The distinction is, by now, familiar: a language of sound is complemented by the language of the body. The audience must learn how to listen and look, to understand the words and read the body, while the speaker must learn to match these two languages, bringing them into harmony. If he is successful in this he will 'move' his hearers, the prime object of all public speaking: 'To move therefore, should be the first great object of every public speaker; and for this purpose, he must use the language of emotions, not that of ideas alone, which of itself has no power of moving' [133].

Sheridan next outlines the various degrees of expertise possible, claiming that a master is 'he who is properly moved, and at the same time delivers himself, in such tones, as delight the ear with their harmony; accompanied by such looks and gestures, as please the eye with their grace; whilst the understanding also perceives their propriety' [133]. We need hardly stress the delivery of self, nor the propriety which indicates ownership, given the tenor of our previous discussion.

<sup>47</sup> The interactions between voice and text far from end here: the libidinous subject will always find its licentious pleasure in the text, and hence its play with the voice is a common feature of textualisation. It might be remarked that the written text is more likely to represent the subject than the spoken effusion, since the text more easily contains the excess that we have come to identify with the eruption of subjectivity. In other words, the elocutionist, in his careful policing of the spoken dimension, eliminates the unwanted excess, whereas the textualist enables the identification of excess and subjectivity. Writing, for the eighteenth century, is a surplus to some extent: it is an overly productive activity, where the possibility of multiple subjects presents itself to the 'author'. The written text, unlike the spoken, never ends – it goes on self-generating as Richardson's endless epistolary explorations of sexuality and textuality more than adequately demonstrate – speech is finite, writing excessive.

<sup>48</sup> Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, pp. 132–3.

The second level of expertise is represented by 'the speaker, who gives way to his emotion, without thinking of regulating their signs; and trusts to the force of nature, unsolicitous about the graces of art' [133], precisely the speaker who does not bring his self to order. The worst kind 'is he, who uses tones and gestures, which he has borrowed from others and which, not being the result of his feelings, are likely to be misapplied, and to be void of propriety, force and grace' [133]; here the full force of the place of the subject becomes apparent: external signs are the only clue to internal emotions, which leads to the absolute necessity of correct and 'proper' links between the two. One must display one's self in speech, and not don the gestures, looks and tones of another.<sup>49</sup>

Public elocution marks the space of the subject, it designates the proper bounds allowed to the individual, his or her space in and for representation. As it does so it correspondingly authorizes the subject as the proper place for speech. This public textualization of the self, its writing as the body, leads to problems, however, which are never far from the surface of Sheridan's strictures. These problems concern the self-production of the self, the auto-production of one's image. As we have seen, Sheridan attempts to restrict such self-authentication through the appeal to the social.<sup>50</sup> However, once the body becomes a text in the public realm, to be read or consumed by others, then the possibility of its becoming a text to one's self, of it reflecting back to one's self the image produced for others arises. In other words, the speaker may become fascinated, or indeed aroused by his own image; precisely a kind of self-indulgence, or indulgence in self that could be seen as far from healthy.

Sheridan is more than aware of this auto-eroticism which is certainly allied to the production of excess: it is, of course, one of the primary aims of the close link between body and voice, or social text and subjective index, to legislate this possible excess. Textuality and sexuality constantly constitute an area of discursive interference during the eighteenth century, so that when the body becomes so explicitly textualized it is almost impossible not to notice the patterns of interference. It is hardly surprising that Sheridan's elocutionary zeal should have thrown up this speculative area of interference, but even Priestley's associationist conceptualization of person is implicated.

<sup>49</sup> Thus the master comes to an awareness of himself through public oration, while that awareness is one of the prerequisites for masterful oratory: 'The complete orator must have a general and intimate knowledge of himself: the world and mankind.' Francis Gentleman, *Introduction to Shakespeare's plays, containing an essay on oratory* (London, 1773), p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> This restriction is very often gender-specific, so that women were not bound by the same rules. A near contemporary handbook for women's conduct, for example, recommends that women practise their conversation alone and in private. The section in which the following stricture appears is entitled 'Of self conversation' and states 'Learn, Madam, to endure being alone, and to converse with yourself; in order to succeed in which you have nothing to do, but to furnish yourself with virtuous and laudable Employment. Idle Persons and Fools are obliged to have perpetual Recourse to other People for Conversation, because they can't be in any Company so bad as their own.' *The lady's preceptor* (Birmingham, 1768), p. 71.

This interference is interestingly the result of Priestley's attempt to connect a theory of the mind based on association with a theory of the subject based on self-authentication:

... since the mind perceives, and is conscious of nothing, but the ideas that are present to it, it must as it were, *conform* itself to them; and even the idea it hath of its own extent, (if we may use that expression) must enlarge or contract with its field of view. By this means also, a person, for this time, enters into, adopts, and is actuated by, the sentiments that are presented to his mind.

... from this principle, sentiments, and views of those persons whose history is written so as to engage our attention, become for a time (if they be not extremely opposite to our own general state of mind) our own passions, sentiments and views. . . .<sup>51</sup>

This can be read as the doctrine of sympathy in its least problematic form, as the most efficacious means of explaining the economy of a correct ethically based social system: the subject participates within society by making sentiment and internal sensation equivalent. Yet, I would argue, this passage is so clearly a repetition of the discussion of sublime experience found in Gerard, that the addition of the term 'person' to the argument cannot but signal the pressure of the discourse of the sublime and of its excess, the self-authenticating subject.

Thus, while we may note the use of the controlling discourse of ethics or the theory of morals articulated in relation to a theory of mind – perhaps the central project for the Scottish enlightenment – we may also register another, and much more problematic discourse surreptitiously at work. This can be located in the use of the common trope to describe the action of sympathy, the entering into and adoption of sentiments presented to the mind. For this trope is also used extremely frequently in descriptions of the activity of reading; so frequently in fact as to become its hallmark.

There, as we shall see in chapter 10, it arouses a large number of extremely complex interconnections between the self and other, between the text and the voice, and eventually breaks apart the smooth surface of the calm doctrine of sympathy in so far as it relates to the positioning of the subject. Consequently, when one 'enters into' and 'adopts' the spirit of the author one is less reverberating harmoniously with the sentiments of another, than entering into a contest which holds out subjectivity, no less, as its prize.<sup>52</sup> This is clear in Priestley's text when he makes the distinction between person and mind, or

<sup>51</sup> Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777), pp. 126–7.

<sup>52</sup> This 'competition' is certainly determined by the relations between text and voice. There are many examples which could be cited, and are in ch. 10. Here, in order to give a sense of the debate, is Lemoine on the subject: 'If you would acquire a just pronunciation in reading, you must not only take in the full sense, but enter into the spirit of your author. For you can never convey the force and fulness of his ideas to another, till you feel them yourself. No man can read an author he does not perfectly understand and taste.' *The art of Speaking; upon an entire new plan* (London, 1797), p. 51.

between the appropriated and the appropriator; for Priestley there is no smooth transition between self and other, or between mind and world.

The turn from the voice to the text in Priestley's translation of the text of history into the passion of the subject is a radical move when seen in the larger context of the terms and conditions of the rise of the subject. For Sheridan's elocutionary movement forces the newly emergent subject into public space and abhors the private manifestation of person. The reasons for this can only be given in terms of the distinctions between public and private, and in relation to the changing political discourses which claimed for themselves the privileged place of speech: precisely a good and loyal citizen. It is to force criticism and dissent into the private space of converse, where the individual lacks those contextualizing markers which give back to him his sense of self: it is to make public assent to society and government the only authentication of the subject. This, it hardly needs pointing out, is being expressed in the years following the Seven Years War, when the sense of nation and its will to power is as strong if not stronger than in the period of the war itself.

Thus, the question over the textualization of the subject in the reading experience concerns the wider political dimensions of the relations between public and private person, between the state as the space of representation for the subject, and all that is entailed by it, and internal consciousness as the individual's ratification of himself. Inner passion and sensation becomes translated into the private self in Priestley's theory, it is restricted in its access to public expression in Sheridan's. The voice of Pitt, as should be more than clear, works its doubled intervention into the spirit and character of the times: at once the supreme example of the private individual in the service of the state, and the private individual eradicated by the needs of a public, nationalist, commercial empire. In this sense the voice of Pitt becomes the most extreme example of the textualization of the body for the rest of the century: it becomes the reference text for every distribution of public and private extensions of personality, the legislating voice of every manifestation of interior private individual speech.

## 7 The Body in Place

Speaking situates the subject and legislates the body: the rules that govern both polite public converse and decorous private conversation circumscribe the space of the body. This can be seen very clearly indeed in the various 'performance' texts which were specifically produced for the reading aloud of literature. In the following chapter, to which this is prelude, the various ways in which the practice of viewing conditioned the space of the body are examined. Here the transition from voice to sight, from voice to text, is effected through the most powerful image of the textualization of the body present to the period: Gilbert Austin's illustration for the performance of Gray's 'Elegy written in a country churchyard'. Here is the performance text of the first stanza:

I.  
Ls veq-vhx      s——B perf——d  
The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
aRs  
F      phf.....q.....  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
sKI  
.....phf——q      B veq  
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
V      B veq——d——B.R.  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

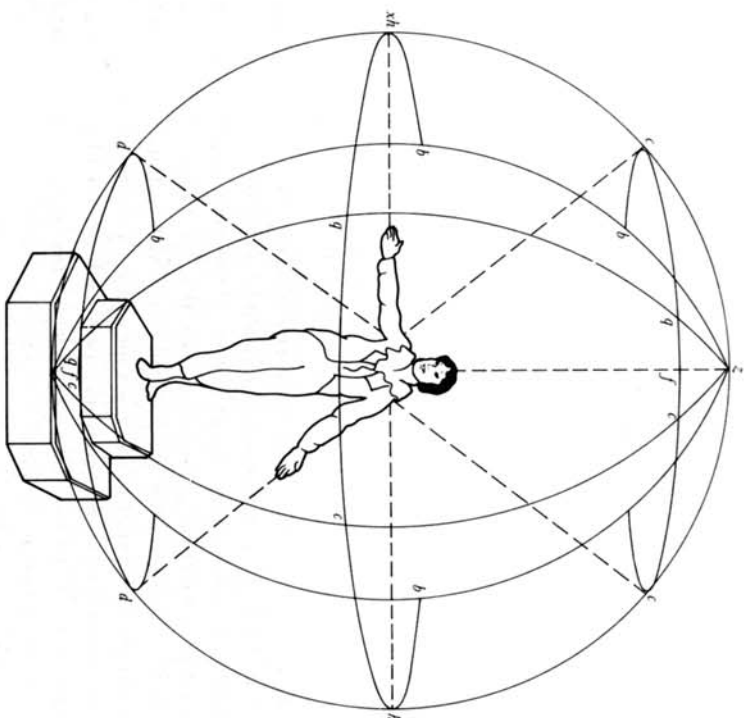
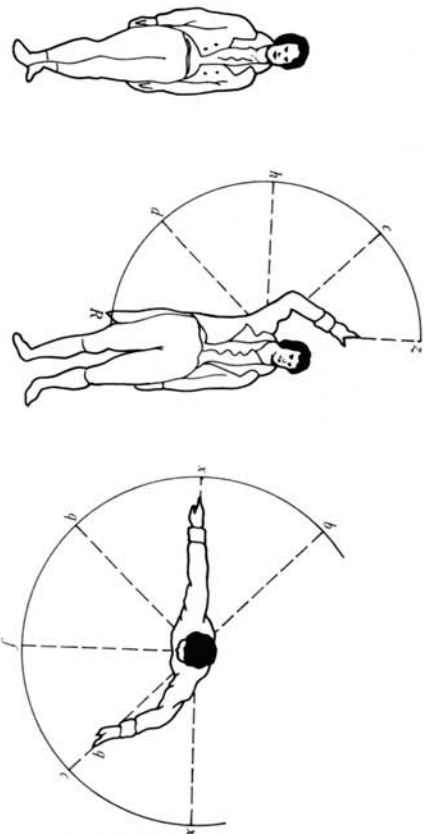
The marks above the first line, 'Ls, veq-vhx' are explained by Austin in the following manner:

In this action the eyes are turned first towards the direction from whence the sound proceeds, and the hand is presented vertical in the same direction; but the eye quickly discovers its own insufficiency, and then the ear, the proper organ, is turned towards the sound, whilst the eyes are bent upon the vacancy, the hand remaining as before. The body

leans forward more or less according to the earnestness of the attention. The attitude is expressed by the notation *veg* (vertical elevated oblique) – *vhx* (vertical horizontal extended) which shows the position of both hands.<sup>1</sup>

We can leave aside the proper organ, for a moment, and continue with the instructions for the rest of the stanza. An *a* indicates when to make a new gesture and a ‘—’ when to complete one. The notation for this first stanza indicates: advance both arms and hands, prone, elevated, forward, and then downward within forty-five degrees of the nadir. The notation below the line give directions for the feet, which should advance to the right two steps. The large letter ‘F’ above the beginning of the second line indicates that the hand should be placed upon the forehead, while *phf*, *q* and *x* instruct the performer to place the hand prone, the arm horizontal and forward, and then oblique and extended. *B veg* indicate that both hands are vertical extended and oblique, while *V* indicates vacancy in the eyes. The end of the stanza instructs the reader to move both hands forward and then downward until both are at rest, *BR*.

This precision for the performance of the text should not surprise us, given the discussion of the preceding chapter. Austin’s notation system is merely more workable than others, and his instructions for movement more applicable or ‘proper’ to the text. The following diagram of the performer, however, takes the genre to new and dizzying heights. Here is the subject in place; the body at one within itself: the subject as the centre, controlling, determining, being the dual axes around which *his* world turns. The body in its proper place.



<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery: comprehending many precepts both ancient and modern, for the proper regulation of the Voice, Countenance, and Gesture* (London, 1806), p. 528.



## 8 Of the Distance of the Picture: the Viewing Subject

It would be difficult to find a set of eighteenth-century enquiries which specified the place of the body as consistently and obsessively as works on perspective. This chapter will put forward a case history of the body in perspective theory, and will range over texts published within the full range of the century, in contrast to the chapter on the speaking subject, which is centred on a reading of the elocutionary movement in the years immediately following the Seven Years War. There are at least seventeen works specifically on the subject of perspective published between 1715 and 1800 – a fact which becomes noteworthy when it is realized that the rules of perspective representation did not change at all over this period. Why it was felt to be necessary to repeat the same precepts over and over, will occupy at least some of the ensuing argument.<sup>1</sup>

However, another reason for choosing the entire sweep of eighteenth-century perspective theory concerns the wider issue of historical method. I will attempt to construct a much larger narrative frame in this chapter in order to take account of an inquiry which would seem, at first glance, to be extremely resistant to its neighbouring contextualizing discourses. The theorist of perspective seems to have been little troubled by shifting relations within those discursive networks which articulated his discursive milieu, and his topic for enquiry seems

to have had an extremely long half-life in comparison with more volatile or responsive theoretical enterprises. If this defines our point of departure it will be incumbent upon the argument to ask why and how these theories remained resistant to the changing discursive milieu, and what this resistance signifies in relation to its placing of the body.

Most works on perspective published during the century conform to a very limited pattern in their discussions of mathematical perspective representation. The basic rules for conveying three-dimensional spatial relationships in two dimensions were formulated by Alberti in his famous 'window' analogy: the artist imagines his vision passing through a transparent 'window' upon which he outlines the objects seen behind it. This form of perspective representation, which is usually termed linear perspective, became the norm extremely quickly in the history of western art.<sup>2</sup> Thus, although there are other kinds of perspective, known to artists since antiquity, the dominance of the linear scheme is all but overwhelming. I shall argue that in relation to eighteenth-century perspective theory this domination once again illustrates the ways in which a legislative theoretical discourse attempts to control and restrict a practice which continually exceeds the boundaries laid down by the theory. In terms of the viewing place, the autonomous subject is a problematic eruption within the practice of viewing. In response to this possible excess of viewpoints linear perspective theory, as we shall see, indicates that one, and only one, place constitutes the 'correct' place for viewing. The practice of looking at pictures, however, departs from such prescriptive rules, not only because of the physical difficulties involved in occupying precisely the one 'true point of sight' from which the canvas was painted, but also on account of the multiplicity of positions taken in the social space of spectating.

We can begin with the most important work on perspective published during the first half of the century, Brook Taylor's *Linear Perspective*, published in 1715 and followed by *New Principles of Linear Perspective* in 1719, which was most widely available during the second half of the century in Joshua Kirby's digest, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective made easy both in theory and practice* (1754).<sup>3</sup> Brook Taylor defines perspective in the following way:

<sup>2</sup> See, however, Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr. *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York, 1975), for a detailed account of the beginnings of linear perspective and its rapid ascendancy over other perspective representational schemes.

<sup>3</sup> Kirby's digest displays Hogarth's ironic comment about unilinear perspective as a frontispiece – the picture in which all the perspectival relations are wittily reversed. This Hogarthian commentary is part of a larger and more insistent attempt made by the artist to refute one-point perspective, which can be found in his *Analysis of Beauty*. The popularity of Taylor's treatise is signalled by the number of works which comment upon it and use its methods and examples. Eighty-eight years later Edward Edwards, for example, published his *A practical treatise of perspective on the principles of Dr Brook Taylor* (London, 1803).

<sup>1</sup> Of course one might retort that the rules of perspective have still not changed, and that they have no reason to, since they are geometric rules governing pictorial representation. This does not, however, explain the reason for the rather large number of books giving these rules. Furthermore, if we take into account the most general works on drawing, painting and so forth, the number of works which deal with perspective is increased very considerably. If one were to increase the sample further, and include works on vision, landscape gardening, the viewing of pictures and buildings and so forth – all texts addressing the question of the place of the body in vision – the number of works becomes very significant indeed. For details of some of these see the bibliography.

Perspective is the Art of drawing on a Plane the Appearances of any Figures, by the Rules of Geometry.

In order to understand the Principles of this Art, we must consider, That a Picture painted in its utmost degree of Perfection, ought so to affect the Eye of the Beholder, that he should not be able to judge, whether what he sees be only a few Colours laid artificially on a Cloth, or the very Objects there represented, seen thro' the Frame of the Picture, as thro' a Window.<sup>4</sup>

This is no more than the standard Albertian analysis of the rules of linear perspective. The viewer, according to Taylor, must at some level be fooled into taking a two-dimensional representation of space as the real world. This is explained by reference to visual and optic science:

To produce this Effect, it is plain the Light ought to come from the Picture to the Spectator's Eye, in the very same manner, as it would do from the Objects themselves, if they really were where they seem to be; that is, every Ray of Light ought to come from any Point of the Picture to the Spectator's Eye, with the same Colour, the same strength of Light and Shadow, and in the same Direction, as it would do from the corresponding Point of the real Object, if it were placed where it is imagined to be. [2]

Taylor, again, is merely following the then current precepts in his analysis of vision. Algarotti, for example, in his *Essay on Painting* which was translated from the Italian in 1763, makes the link between optics and perspective drawing very clear:

As practice, therefore, ought in every thing to be built upon principle, the study of Opticks, as far as it is requisite to determine the degree in which objects are to be illuminated or shaded, should proceed hand in hand with that of perspective. And this, in order that the shades, cast by figures upon the planes on which they stand, may fall properly, and be neither too strong nor too light: in a word, that those most beautiful effects of the chiaroscuro may run no risk of ever receiving the lie from truth, which, sooner or later, discovers itself to every eye.<sup>5</sup>

This connection between optics and drawing is hardly new, whereas the link between anatomy and perspective signals the emergence of a growing preoccupation for perspective theorists during the course of the century.<sup>6</sup> John

<sup>4</sup> Brook Taylor, *Linear Perspective, or, a new method of representing justly all manner of Objects as they appear to the Eye in all situations* (London, 1715), p. 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Algarotti, *An Essay on Painting* (London, 1764), pp. 37–8.

<sup>6</sup> The link between anatomy and drawing is as old as the interest in the physical description of the body. However, the link between anatomy and perspective signals a slightly different departure, not from the side of drawing, which had always required a competence in the representation of the exterior form of the body, but from the side of anatomy which changes its relationship to the human body as a coefficient of the available representations of it. This is to point out a deeply problematic relationship between perspective, the correct but fictionalised account of the human body in two dimensions, and anatomy, the science of the separation or dis-

Brisbane's *The Anatomy of Painting: or a short and easy introduction to anatomy* (1769), for example, explains that an anatomist should look upon the human body with the eye of a painter in order to duplicate what he terms 'picturesque anatomy'.<sup>7</sup> The anatomist needs the drawing skills of the artist in order to represent the human body adequately, but what does the artist learn from the anatomist?<sup>8</sup> This question raises important issues in terms of the wider argument of this chapter, as it concerns the distances between the body as a physical object within space and the body as a space of representation, precisely a space within which the subject is representable and represented; the place of subjection.

The artist, according to Brook Taylor in his *New Principles of Linear Perspective* (London, 1719), must take care not to allow the representation to take over, to express itself. In relation to the body, the space of representation must match the space of the real: the body is pictured correctly when it is precisely controlled by the real space in which the body is experienced. The use of perspective is crucial, then, in order to contain the place of the body in representation:

The Art of Perspective is necessary to all Arts, where there is any occasion for Designing; as Architecture, Fortification, Carving, and generally all the Mechanical Arts; but it is more particularly necessary to the Art of Painting, which can do nothing without it. A Figure in a Picture, which is not drawn according to the Rules of Perspective, does not represent what is intended, but something else. So that it seems to me, that a Picture which is faulty in this particular, is as blameable, or more so, than any Composition in Writing, which is faulty in point or Orthography, or Grammar. . . [viii]

It is the 'something else' that troubles Taylor: the representation of the body may be 'faulty' precisely on account of its excess, the surplus produced by representation and in between the intention of the artist and the representation itself. It is precisely this 'in between' which, I shall argue, is the place of

section of the distinct parts of the human body. Anatomy, as part of the rationalist enterprise, can be seen as one of the results of the project to construct a complete taxonomy of the body. It not only serves the purposes of medical science, but also participates in the wider discussion of the placement of the body, and its relations to the subject. In this respect anatomy is very clearly linked to certain forms of figuration derived from the metaphorical site of the body; anatomy is linked to anatomy, a point discussed in some detail in relation to Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* in my 'Criticism's Place', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 25.2 (Spring, 1984), pp. 199–214.

<sup>7</sup> John Brisbane, *The Anatomy of Painting: or a short and easy introduction to anatomy* (London, 1769), p. xii. Cf. Algarotti: 'The study of Perspective should go hand in hand with that of Anatomy', *An Essay on Painting*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> This question could only be answered adequately through an exhaustive study of the interrelations between anatomy and painting: from the side of pictorial representation work has certainly been done, which can be explained by the fact that enough 'major' artists produced images of the human body based on anatomical drawings – Rembrandt's 'Anatomy Lesson' being the most obvious example and which has been discussed in some detail by Francis Barker in *The Tremulous Private Body* (London, 1984). There is, however, rather less discussion of anatomists and their uses of pictorial representation.

contestation, for it is this space which is occupied by the subject through the depiction and apprehension of the space of the body. Here, Taylor is merely following the ethical and social rules of decorum which are embedded within the strictures concerning 'correct' perspective.

Taylor does allow a creative aspect to this process of representation, but the terms he uses to describe it are most instructive:

The Art of Painting, taken in its full Extent, consists of two Parts; the Inventive, and the Executive. The Inventive part is common with Poetry, and belongs more properly and immediately to the Original Design (which it invents and disposes to the most proper and agreeable manner) than to the Picture, which is only a Copy of that Design already formed in the Imagination of the Artist. The Perfection of this Art of Painting depends upon the thorough Knowledge the Artist has of all the Parts of his Subject; and the Beauty of it consists in the happy Choice and Disposition that he makes of it: and it is in this that the Genius of the Artist discovers and shews itself, while he indulges and humours his Fancy, which here is not confined. [xi]

The use of the part/whole distinction, the synecdochic figuration which will take on increasing importance as we progress, is noteworthy not only in relation to the duality it articulates between imagination and representation, but also between the activities of invention and execution. These latter two may look harmless enough, and as if they are fully grounded within a rhetorical framework of pictorial production, but when we consider the role of the 'executive' as a legislating body it becomes immediately apparent that a politics of representation, as much as of the representation of politics, is being articulated. The subject, then, is not only 'subjected' to the rules of perspective, its representation not only legislated by the power of 'execution' practised by the painter, it is also subject to the power of the 'executive', brought to law by the body which authenticates legality. The space of representation takes on a more political sheen when seen in this light: it is that place in which a 'subject' may see itself in representation, as represented. It is this question, about the political representation of the subject, that I take as part of the interior of this discourse on perspective. Thus, where Taylor's strictures on the control of the artist's 'creative' powers can be happily read in terms of pictorial decorum, I want to trouble that surface and read such comments in broader terms, and to relate the space of the subject in representation – the correct image – to the space for representation granted to the subject. It is this disjunction, between the subject as representation and in representation, which I see as part of the excess of the legislative theory of perspective.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This analysis is determined by our earlier discussion of the discourse of the sublime which had projected the identification of the discursive excess with the subject. Now we will take a different set of enquiries, on perspective, and read them as if they were a discourse on the subject, thereby making the earlier discursive analytic on the sublime productive, folding it back upon its product, the subject.

We can see something of the friction caused by such a disjunction in the following comments on the 'freedom' of the artist:

Wherefore if at any time the Artist happens to imagine, that his Picture would look better, if he should swerve a little from these Rules, he may assure himself, that the Fault belongs to his Original Design, and not to the Strictness of the Rules; for what is perfectly agreeable and just in the real Original Objects themselves, can never appear defective in a Picture, where these Objects are exactly copied. [xiii]

We might pause here and note that Taylor's treatise is one among a very large number of works published during the period on 'correctness': the proper form of speech, as we have already noted conditioned almost half a century of manners and conversation. Here, the 'proper form' of pictorial representation conditions and controls the artist: correct decorum must be observed. This restriction of the subject, however, does not persist throughout the century, so that *The Artist's Assistant* claims in a more relaxed manner:

Perspective is the Art of delineating objects (as they appear in Nature upon a plain surface) according to their Distance and Height perpendicular to the Horizon, between the Object and the Eye.

This Art is of great Consequence to those who would excel in Drawing, Etching, Engraving, Carving in Bas-Relief, or Painting; for being well understood, the Artist will be enabled to know when to adhere to the strict Rules, and when to depart from them with Propriety.<sup>10</sup>

It would appear from this that between Taylor's prescriptive perspective and the artist's handbook published in 1788 a considerable change had occurred, which can only in part be explained by changing attitudes to decorum, and to the rules governing various forms of behaviour. It is this change, from the absolute power of the legislative discourse, to the recognition of its inability to control all forms of practice – what we have come to recognize as precisely the excessive production of theory – which will be traced in the following. Although the *Artist's Assistant* hardly marks the decisive break between the absolute legislative function of perspective theory – exemplified by Brook Taylor's standard work – and its relative legislative power of consent – put forward above by *The Artist's Assistant* – it is enough to register the considerable change between these two markers. Again, it seems to me that the narrative model which uses the notion of 'rupture' or break may not be useful to this history of discourse, especially given that perspective theory, in so far as it establishes correct rules for pictorial representation, does not change at all over the course of the century. We are immediately faced with the problem, then, of writing a history of an object which has no history, when history is understood in terms of change. This problem will be addressed by focusing on the eleven works on perspective published between 1738, when Hamilton's *Stereography, or, a complete body of*

<sup>10</sup> *The Artist's Assistant*, 5th edn (London, 1788), p. 10.

*perspective* appeared, and 1775, when Ferguson's *The art of drawing in perspective* was published.<sup>11</sup> The Seven Years War, happily, lies midway between these dates.

The first of those works, Hamilton's *Stereography*, attempts to make the distinction between three kinds of viewing situation, only one of which can be properly called perspective. He writes:

*Stereographical Description* is of three sorts, which take their Denominations from the several Situations of the Object, and the Plane of the Section, with respect to the Point from whence the Object is supposed to be seen, or the Place of the Eye.<sup>12</sup>

Hamilton, as we can note, is mainly preoccupied with the *positionality* involved in the viewing and drawing situation. This placing of the viewer in relation to the object of sight is the primary means by which perspective theory will legislate the body, and is the crucial factor in the excessive practice of viewing and the corresponding malfunction of the legislative discourse. The body becomes, in effect, too plural, the site of too many meanings, the place of too much signification in order for it to remain placed in just one position. Hamilton, however, makes it clear that perspective only applies to the first set of his viewing categories: 'when the Plane of the Section is between the Eye and the Object, it takes the name of *Perspective*' [15], thereby placing the two further positions for viewing outside the rule of perspective. These two surplus positionalities are defined in the following manner:

Secondly, When the Object is between the Eye and the Plane of the Section, it is then called *Projection*: and here the Rays proceeding from the Object to the Eye, are supposed to be continued on beyond the Object, till they cut the Plane: it is therefore called *Projection*, the Image of the Object being in a manner projected or thrown forward upon a Plane beyond it. [1, 15]

Here the precise optical or physical conditions of viewing are taken into account in order to place the viewer correctly. One might note, however, that the object in the above situation acts as if it were transparent, since the viewer is clearly able to see it as a representation upon the plane – he sees beyond the object, through the real world to its representation. If we think of this in terms of the shadow cast by an object upon a screen the situation makes some kind of sense, but, as we know, that shadow is only an outline and it casts an image that does not

<sup>11</sup> These works are: Hamilton, *Stereography*; Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method* (1754); Thomas Bardwell, *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy* (1756); Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method, with examples* (1757); Daniel Fournier, *Treatise on the theory and practice of perspective* (1761); John Lodge Cowley, *The Theory of Perspective demonstrated* (1765); *The Art of Drawing in Perspective* (1769); Joseph Priestley, *A Familiar Introduction to the theory and practice of Perspective* (1770); Edward Noble, *The Elements of Linear Perspective* (1771); Thomas Malton, *A Complete Treatise on Perspective* (1778); and James Ferguson, *The art of drawing in perspective* (1775).

<sup>12</sup> J. Hamilton, *Stereography, or, a complete body of perspective*, 2 vols (London, 1738) I, p. 15.

correspond to its own dimensions, depending upon its distance from the screen. It makes less sense if the object is 'seen through' to its representation on the plane since if it is transparent there is no 'object' to represent. That we are in the realm of the subject should be more than apparent here. Furthermore, the line of the projection is confused, since the direction must logically be from the eye, through the object to the plane of representation. This is not quite what Hamilton states; he maintains that the rays emanate from the object to the eye and on to the plane. What has transpired here is fairly clear: it is the subject, the eye, which in fact becomes transparent.

The third of Hamilton's viewing situations makes this paradox more visible and pushes the 'real' of the place of viewing even more into the realm of the imaginary:

Lastly, when the Eye is supposed to be between the Object and the Plane of the Section: here the Eye must be considered only as a Point, through which all the projecting Rays pass, and are continued on till they cut the Plane of the Section on the opposite Side. This kind of Description may be therefore called *Transprojection*, the Image of every Point of the Object being in a manner projected through the common Point upon the Plane of the Section: and hence it arises, that the Image thus formed is Inverted, and bears the same Similitude to its Original, as the Image formed in the *Retina* of the Eye doth to the Object seen by it.

'Tis true this kind of Projection is only Imaginary; for if the Point, through which the Visual Rays are here supposed to pass, be considered as the Eye looking on the Plane of the Section, then the Object will be behind it, and therefore must be out of sight: . . . [1, 15]

The use of 'optics', and the analogy of the retina are both very instructive, since the 'real' of the viewing situation is clearly only a figurative construct: one can argue from optics that the eye be placed between the object and the representation – as an analogy it might work – but it clearly does not work in the realm of the physical. Here the body inhabits figurative not real space, but to continue the discourse of the subject outlined above, it makes the point that the subject, as object, is always behind the screen, behind the body, out of sight. This description is so marked by analogical orderings – the eye to be considered only as a point, the image inverted as on the retina, the projection considered as the eye looking on the plane of the section – that it precisely places in perspective the account of vision. In other words, vision is subordinated to, put under the sign of, perspective in order to account for an imaginary position for viewing 'in the real'. We might ask why Hamilton includes these two excessive positionalities, those demanded by representations formed by projection and transprojection, in his account of perspective. This question becomes more vexed when we consider Hamilton's further comments about the *precise positioning* of the subject in the viewing of correct perspectival representations.

He states that in order for the correct perspective to be in the picture and also for its correct construal by the viewer to occur, both the precise mathematical distances between objects on the canvas and the canvas and the viewer must be adhered to:

The Picture then may have any Position given it with respect to the Objects represented, but these ought always to appear in a Situation natural to them with respect to the true Horizon; and consequently whatever Relation the Picture may have to the Objects, it ought to be so placed with respect to the Spectator's Eye, that the same Relation may be preserved; that such Objects as, in their natural Situation, are usually visible by Rays parallel to the Horizon, may be seen in the Picture by the like Rays, and those which usually require an exalted or depressed Turn of the Eye to be observed, may demand the same in the Picture. [II, 386–7]

This mathematical distance is termed, after Brook Taylor, the 'distance of the picture', and is generally dissociated from the distance of the vanishing point. The former measures the space between the viewer and the picture, whereas the latter measures the orthogonal on the picture plane itself.<sup>13</sup> This prescription of the various distances involved in a perspective representation is one of the most forceful forms of legislation executed by theory over the practice of viewing.<sup>14</sup> Hamilton goes on to explain that the viewer *must* stand at precisely the point required by the theory of perspective, the point of sight, since the image is made for that positionality:

It being evident from the Nature of Stereography, that a Picture cannot appear strictly true, unless the Eye be placed exactly in the Point of Sight for which it was drawn: It follows, that a Picture ought always to be placed in such a Position, that it may be viewed from that Point. [II, 389]

This placing of the body at the point of sight becomes problematic, however, once vision becomes an internal as well as external faculty, once one sees as much with the mind, or the imagination as with the eyes. Furthermore, both the size of a canvas and its own position may cause severe problems,<sup>15</sup> recognized by

<sup>13</sup> The measurement of the space between the viewer and the picture was also termed the 'point of distance'. On this see Edward Edwards, *A Practical Treatise of Perspective*, p. 92: 'The distance of the picture, or point of distance, is a point which is generally set off upon the horizontal line, either way from the centre of the picture or point of sight, in the same proportionate measure that the painter or spectator is supposed to stand distant from the picture, or from the view, or object he means to represent. The old writers call it the *point of distance*, but Dr Brook Taylor, the *distance of the picture*'.

<sup>14</sup> Kirby makes the point in the strongest and clearest terms: '... it hath always been a fundamental Maxim in Perspective, to have but one Point of Sight for the same Picture; and the Reason of this is demonstrable from the Nature of Vision, the Principles of Optics, and the Precepts of Design.' John Joshua Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective compared with the Examples lately published on this subject*... London [1757], p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> The practice of hanging pictures could not have been conducive to this kind of stricture: canvasses were often hung one above another, from floor to ceiling in fact, if one is to take Temiers's depiction of The Archduke Leopold's Gallery as a faithful representation. From this one might suggest that it was nigh impossible to view a picture from its correct point of sight. Here practice seems to contradict, or at the very least be oblivious to, theory.

Hamilton when he discusses the relations between the height and distance of the eye to the size of the canvas:

It is therefore necessary... to suit the Size of the Picture to the Distance of the Eye, that nothing in it may appear monstrous or unnatural, where-ever the Eye be placed to view it: for although a Picture can in strictness be truly seen, only from the true Point of Sight, yet when the Distance of the Eye is pretty large with respect to the Size of the Picture, so that the greatest Dimension of the Picture may be seen under a Right Angle or less, any little Deviation of the Eye from its true Place, will not have so sensible an Effect on the Appearance of the Picture, as when the Distance is smaller, or the Picture of a greater Extent.

And as Pictures are generally, if not always placed in such Positions, that they may be viewed from several different Situations; they ought to be so drawn, that in any of those Situations, fronting them, they may appear as little disagreeable to the Eye as may be; and if nothing in the Picture in these Views, appear remarkably deformed, the Eye will overlook little Variations from the strict Appearance the Objects ought to have, and the Imagination will be ready to supply the Defect. [II, 393–4]

Here the theory attempts to take account of both viewing and hanging practice: the image should be amenable to multiple and distanced viewing positions. The small distortions in 'true sight' which occur can, in practice, be corrected by the imagination. Because of this, once the imagination becomes a productive power within the viewing experience the need for mathematical rule-bound precision decreases, and the position of the viewer becomes flexible. More than this, however, the imagination also enables the viewer to see through the picture to the real world, to the objects that stand behind the representations:

When the Eye is placed in the true Point of Sight to view a Picture, the Imagination doth not stop at the Lines and Figures actually drawn in the Picture, but is carried on beyond it, to the Original Objects which are supposed to produce those Images, the Picture itself being only considered as a transparent Plane through which the Objects are seen. [II, 394]

Once again the predominant trope is derived from the Albertian scheme: the plane of representation is, in the best of all possible worlds, transparent, a window through which one looks on to the real world. Various difficulties arise in this figuration, such as the self-motivation of the 'Imagination' which 'doth not stop', and its sudden loss of self-generated movement in the phrase following: it 'is carried beyond it'. We are not told what carries it, nor in fact what does produce the image, since the original objects are merely 'supposed' to produce them. We should be familiar with this kind of hesitation, for it is precisely the distinguishing feature of the discourse on the sublime, as it attempts to construct a controlling discourse which, in its very effort to legislate, produces the overplus. Here it is quite clearly the identification of the viewing subject with the artist – the creative subject – that produces this transcendently authentic viewing experience. This identification subjects the viewer to the subject position of the painter in the 'real', not in discourse; it allows the

spectator to experience subjectivity in the true Point of Sight. What is 'seen' from here is not a representation but the self-mastering the real as the veil of representation is torn apart, and the glass which stands between the subject and the real world of objects is shattered. The viewing subject is no longer subjected to representation but becomes the master of it, master of subjectation, master of itself.

I have given Hamilton's work considerable space because it is very representative of the other ten works cited earlier. Almost all the treatises which follow Hamilton, as Hamilton followed Taylor, repeat, on occasion word for word, these precepts. In this sense perspective theory could be said to be static during the century: the mathematical rules of linear perspectival representation are neither challenged nor refined.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a severe challenge to the system since its foundation in geometry would require either a new mathematics of spatial relationships, or a non-mathematical theory of perspective. Yet the fact remains that ten further works were published during the next thirty-seven years, all of them solely on the topic of unilinear perspective, and all of them to a lesser or greater extent repetitions of the same hand-me-down precepts. From this curiosity alone one's suspicions might be awakened that something else was the abiding concern of these works, even if it may have been hidden from the direct view of the treatises themselves.

In this regard a marginal comment in the British Library copy of Joshua Kirby's *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective made easy both in theory and practice* helps us to clarify part of this hidden agenda. The comment appears at the point where we might expect to find a disturbance within perspective theory. Kirby has given the familiar definition of the distance required for a correct view, the 'True Point of Sight', before going on to describe 'Some consequences which arise from viewing Pictures from any other than the true Point of Sight':

From what has been said upon the distance and height of the eye, it is manifest, that no perspective representations will appear so natural as when viewed from the true point of sight; because, at that point only, all the rays which are supposed to come from the original objects, and produce their several projections upon the picture, will concur at the eye in their proper point, and thereby exhibit a picture upon the retina exactly similar to that of their originals. But if the eye is not placed in the true point of sight, the projections of all objects, which are not parallel to the picture, will not seem to tend to their proper

vanishing points: and for that reason, such representations will appear as starting out of their proper places, will lose their just proportions, and consequently will not convey absolute and perfect appearances to the eye of the spectator, viz. such as are strictly to be deemed mathematical projections. And to this we may add the bad effect it will have upon the horizontal line in particular, which is always determined by the place of the eye.

What has been said upon this head, relates principally to pictures painted upon uneven grounds, such as domes, vaulted roofs, irregular walls, etc. where the least variation from the true point of sight, will be productive of the above, and other bad consequences: but as to flat pictures, the fancy will be ready to give some assistance towards correcting what is not strictly right in them: and therefore, a little variation of the eye from the true point of sight, is allowable in such cases: because no great inconvenience will appear, so long as the eye keeps upon a level with the horizontal line.<sup>17</sup>

The familiar stricture once again determines the space to be occupied by the viewing subject: the true point of sight locates the position in which the viewer undergoes a precise identification between himself and the painter. Once again the problematic situation in which the object is viewed from more than one position is addressed: here the 'fancy' comes to the rescue, adjusting the errors as long as the eye is at the correct horizontal line. At this point it may be useful to rehearse the main points at issue in this legislative theory of perspective. We can begin by noting that the viewing situation is necessarily bound up with the production and non-persistence of the subject: the viewer does not take to the picture his or her subjectivity, rather, the opposite case pertains in which the subject is produced in the space between the eye and the canvas, in the distance of the picture. Therefore the subject in the circuit of vision becomes the subject in and of representation, and the task perspective theory addresses is to restrict this subject to its proper place, its subject position in the 'real' of viewing: the true point of sight. Now we may turn to the marginal annotation, pencilled by some unknown hand, which appears at the point in Kirby's text where the last citation above ends. It reads:

This is not sound doctrine – a large portion of the charms and value of a good picture consists in the fact that, when placed in a good light – it may be contemplated and enjoyed by a company or party of many persons at the same moment. Each seeing it from a different point. Each taking his distance according to the length of his vision – This notion of a propriety in the view of a picture, being taken, from 'the true point of sight' is confounded. Try – if you doubt on the subject.<sup>18</sup>

It does not matter that we do not know the identity of this reader since the comment, marginal and transgressive as it is, articulates the text's own disturbance,

<sup>16</sup> John Lodge Cowley, in his *The Theory of Perspective demonstrated*, does add the stricture that colouring also contributes to perspective representations. He writes: '... recourse must be had to the painter's skill in the art of colouring, for rendering the illusions thus truly perfect: but, nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance to determine rightly the positions which the several lines and points, terminating the original objects, must have on the picture, so as to enable them, when duly coloured, to produce the effect wished for by the artist: whence the arts of perspective and colouring should go hand in hand, and afford reciprocal assistance to each other' I, p. 109. This appears in the section headed 'Of the consequences which attend the viewing of a picture from any other than the point of sight'.

<sup>17</sup> Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective made easy*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Marginal note in Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective made Easy*, p. 62.

asserting, on the contrary, that each viewer has his own 'propriety' of view, has precisely his own true point of sight, point of view. He brings this to the picture, it is not produced in the space opened up in the experience of viewing it. Indeed, the viewer brings his own space with which to confront the picture, a 'subject space' that is, moreover, given contours by the recognition of others and defined in the social, for the circuit of vision here is not an interior private affair, an inward sight which is compounded by the imagination or fancy, but an exterior social experience, in which the place of the subject is necessarily mediated by and inserted within society. Are we reading too strongly by taking this last comment, 'if you doubt the subject', ironically as referring to the doubt of the subject, the subject in question? Is this textual excess – the annotation – the proper subject of Kirby's own commentary? Is the flickering of the subject within the main body of the text – the compromise which allows a 'little variation in the true point of sight' – generative of this last refutation 'Try – if you doubt on the subject? Is this the articulation of the text's own sense of self? We can play these variations on this deeply felicitous annotation but do not need to question their status since the thrust of the annotation, that the social produces personality and the sense of self, is evident enough. Its ramifications within a considerable number of contemporaneous debates, most notably those concerned with the persistence of subjectivity, are also more than clear.<sup>19</sup>

We may note, then, that theories of perspective are not merely concerned with the legislation of drawing, they are not simply rule books for painters; rather, they are intertwined within the discourses of control which surround the body: just as elocution theory legislates the movement and gestures of the body, so perspective theory legislates the space of the body, its positionality. It does this by insisting on the identity between the 'point of sight' taken by the viewer and the place occupied by the painter when he created the picture. The theory, however, is faced with the excess of practice, the multiple viewpoints taken by numbers of different subjects in the social space of viewing. Unlike elocutionary theory which produces the autonomous subject as its excess, perspective theory resists and refuses the practice which it cannot contain and legislate: the polyvalent point of sight. In this sense it is closer to the discourse on the sublime than the discourse of it. Furthermore, it equates multiple viewpoints with a self-authenticated subject, thereby restricting the possibility of entering into subjectivity to the one, uniform and unitary point of sight. It is practice here which fractures the authority of theory: the space which opens up in the 'real' viewing situation is excessive, plural in regard to theory, and it is this fracturing of the law of the true point of sight which will be discussed in detail below. I have termed this new, excessive, space the distance of the subject, making an analogy with the positioning of the painter to the representation, the space perspective

<sup>19</sup> Hume's discussion of this is the most well known, and was heatedly debated. See David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, 2nd edn by L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Niddich (Oxford, 1978), pp. 251–63.

theory deems the only true one, which it calls the distance of the picture.<sup>20</sup>

We can begin the discussion of the distance of the subject by taking a slightly different tack, noting a conceptual problem which arises in these legislative theories over the place of viewing and the play of representation. Edward Noble's *The Elements of Linear Perspective* tackles this question by resorting to the differences between the mechanics of optics – thereby isolating where vision takes place – and the mechanics of perspective drawing – isolating where representation takes place. Thus, although his comments on perspective follow the habitual pattern, his attempts to dissect and control vision itself signal a stronger effort to legislate the body, and a further intervention into the discourses of sociality – the practice of viewing – which produce the excessive position of the distance of the subject. Nobel writes:

The *appearance*, then, of an object, is formed on the retina: but the *perspective representation* of an object is formed on the plane of the picture: and altho' the same object will always have the same *appearance*, when viewed from the same place, yet it may have ten thousand different *perspective representations*; because the rays proceeding from the said object to the eye, (and which cause the *appearance*) may be cut by a plane in an infinite number of situations and positions; and these various sections of those rays, will form so many different *perspective representations*, all of which will afford the eye the same sensations, (that is, all these will have the same *appearance*) as the real object itself:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> This distance of the picture is termed the 'distance of the eye' by Kirby, and is defined as follows: 'The choosing a proper distance for the eye is so essential in all perspective representations, that without a nice observance thereof, every object will appear unnatural and preposterous, let the rules by which it was drawn be ever so true in theory, or exactly observed in practice. The reason of this will appear extremely obvious, if we consider that there is one certain distance, at which the eye can see an object with more distinctness than it can at any other, and this distance may be called the *True Point of Sight* in respect to that object.' Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective made easy*, p. 60. Edward Edwards points out the necessity of distinguishing between the various distances involved to the student who 'must make himself master of the distinction between the centre of the picture and the point of sight; also of the distance of the picture, and the distance of a vanishing point; for if those principles are not well understood, no great progress can ever be made in the science.' *A practical treatise of perspective*, p. 19. Mastery would seem to be an imperative here.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Noble, *The Elements of Linear Perspective* (London, 1771), pp. 79–80. This distinction between appearance and reality is taken up by William Robson in his *Grammographia; or The Grammar of Drawing* (Bath, 1799), p. 13, but is collapsed by Daniel Fournier in his *A Treatise of the theory and practice of perspective* published the same year as Noble's *Elements*. Fournier claims: 'In order to have a clear idea of the principles of this art, we are to consider that a picture drawn perfectly true, and placed in a proper position, ought so to appear to the spectator, that he should not be able to distinguish the representation from the real original objects actually placed where they are represented to be. To produce this effect, it is necessary that the rays of light ought to come from the several parts of the picture to the spectator's eye with the same circumstances of direction, strength of light and shadow, and colour, as they would do from the corresponding parts of the real objects seen in their proper places.' p. 7. This also bears on the comments below, p. 203 following, on the nature of representation.

Something of a problem arises here, since the difference between the appearance and a perspective representation – an image on the retina and an image on the picture plane – is collapsed when the operation of sight is taken into account. This is common sense since we can only see the perspective representation through the eye, and by attending to the image on the retina. But by collapsing the distance between the image on the retina and on the picture plane Noble creates a self-reflexive circuit of vision in which the contradiction produced by an object having ten thousand different perspective representations, which nevertheless 'will have the same appearance', is defused. This still does not eradicate the problem of how the viewer might see behind the appearance to the reality of the representation, and through that to the reality of the object, when all he has is the evidence of sight, the image on the retina. This problem, it seems to me, arises on account of the pressure within unilinear perspective theory to recognize if not theorize the social activity of viewing in which more than one point of sight is present to the viewing situation. Such pressure is manifest by the insistence, over and over in all these works, that one see *through* the rules of perspective, and it is in part the product of the practice of viewing any two-dimensional representation which can, to all intents and purposes, remain entirely ignorant of these rules. Seeing *through* perspective, then, has a number of connotations which will become more relevant as we progress.

Optics is here brought to the aid of perspective theory, but it is hardly up to the task, since the 'science' of optics must, of necessity, recognize that the visual is unique to every body: sight is a function of our individuality, of our physical uniqueness, and vision is, therefore, etched on the body and constructed by physicality, the organs of sight. This accounts for the need to recognize both the universality of sight along with the individuality of vision: one's body determines the optical in precisely the same way for each individual, even as the exact physical organs differ from person to person, body to body. This recognition, via optics, of the uniqueness of the individual body pushes perspective theory towards a further recognition that each individual has his or her own distance to the picture, and, therefore, distance of the subject. Noble, in following his predecessors, finally diminishes this last point in his appeal to the 'true point of sight', the familiar position of the artist:

It is not therefore the situation of the eye with regard to the picture, that can produce a bad effect; for altho' by placing the *plane of the picture*, very obliquely between the eye and the object, the *representation* may be totally unlike the *appearance* of that object, yet all this dissimilarity vanishes, when the eye is placed to view the picture, in the same position in which it was supposed, when the picture was drawn. [81]

There are still larger questions involved here, concerning the languages of representation and their mediated relations to the real. If we understand pictorial representation as bound within the limits of the real: as a representation of the objects for which it stands, then the possibility of its producing something in excess, an image that goes beyond the real, poses a considerable threat to the horizons which determine the order of representa-

tion. We have seen how perspective rules determine positionalities, both within the image and exterior to it, but we should note that they also control the possible productive excess of the image. If the image itself were to produce multiple points of sight, as Hogarth's prints do, then a number of forcefully maintained relationships between the image and its maker, the image and the viewer, and the viewer and the image's maker are liable to disintegrate.<sup>22</sup> It is striking, therefore, that theories of perspective nearly unfailingly conclude with a discussion of the 'excessive image' *par excellence*, the anamorphosis.

Clearly at first sight such images appear excessive or deviant in the extreme, yet the reason for their inclusion is far more telling, since the anamorphosis is the exemplary form of image for linear perspective: the viewer can only occupy one place from which to view the representation in order to make sense of it. The anamorphosis is a spectral excess, it is a deviant form merely on the surface: the image itself only appears excessive until it is correctly construed, that is until it is viewed from the precise position required in order to defigure the scrambled image. In this way it is more rule-governed than any other image, the point of sight more crucial and the distance of the subject, therefore, more tightly controlled.

This takes us to the heart of the matter, for the anamorphosis is merely the most fully controlled image, demanding a unique viewing position in order to give up its 'truth' of representation – the object represented. In this way what at first sight appears to be a scrambled or false image is in fact precisely the same as any other representation, merely requiring the viewer to occupy the true point of sight more urgently. If this is the case, the nature of representation and the requirements it makes for its decoding come into question, for if certain special conditions are required by the anamorphosis, and if it is taken that such images are merely more rule-governed as to their viewing positionalities than 'normal' representations, then the status of the 'normal' image must also be examined. Is it, for example, different from the special case of the anamorphosis only in respect to its multiple viewing positions, or, alternatively, a more pressing question, is its 'truth' to the real much greater than the special case of the scrambled image presented by anamorphosis?<sup>23</sup> These questions are brought to

<sup>22</sup> These relationships concern the 'truth' or the 'meaning' of the image, the property rights of the image maker and the economic considerations of the viewer who may purchase the image. Something of the disturbance created by the shattering of these relations can be glimpsed in our own contemporary debates about the 'meanings' of texts and the location for the production of those meanings.

<sup>23</sup> There are many more examples of anamorphic images than one might be led to think from the very few pictures that are regularly discussed. For the most renowned use of Holbein's the Ambassadors, with its anamorphosis of a skull puncturing the otherwise 'normal' picture plane, see J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, XI, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse (Paris, 1973), pp. 75–84.



the fore in an unsigned treatise entitled *Perspective: or, the Art of Drawing the Representations of all Objects upon a Plane* in which the author comments on perspective, 'this art', in the following manner:

... it has been objected by some, that this art does not shew us truth, but deceives us with false appearances: alleging, that nothing appears to us as it really is, but in a quite different form. It is true, if we regard the picture itself as an object, which is a piece of paper, being nothing but a plane surface perpendicular to the horizon, with several lines and colourings laid on it; then it gives us a false appearance of itself. But nobody that draws a picture, ever intends that it should represent itself; and therefore this objection will be nothing to the purpose. For the picture is always designed to represent a thing that is out of the picture; and therefore if the picture truly represents that thing, then it shews us truth. And if it does not in all respects, represent it truly; then so far as that fails, it does not represent the thing intended, but something else; and then indeed it shews us falsehood. So that if the picture is truly drawn, it shews truth; but it never shews falsehood, but when it is falsely drawn.<sup>24</sup>

We should recall the 'something else' referred to at the outset, the excess of representation over and above the artist's intentions. Here the author makes it quite clear that there is a moral dimension to the realm of representation: the image should not be false, it should not lie. This account of representation deviates very little from the entire western tradition of treatises on the subject: to represent is to make something absent present. Problems trouble its surface, however, when it is claimed that if the picture 'truly represents that thing then it shews us truth', for how are we to tell or to verify that an image is true to the real when all we have is the image?<sup>25</sup> The statement is clearly inconsistent in relation to a logic of demonstration, but that is not its purpose, since its major aim is to legislate the production of images and to make them conform to certain conventions. To make apodictic statements such as found in the last sentence is to foreclose the argument: the author does not want his reader to question the necessary and pure relationship between an object in the world and its representation. They are linked as body and soul, intention to representation, and the excess produced by representation itself must be controlled if these relationships are to remain stable.

The place of the viewer, then, is strictly confined on moral as well as technical visual grounds if one holds to this necessary connection between representation and intention. Such a view was not, of course, universally held; indeed a very

<sup>24</sup> *Perspective: or, the Art of drawing the Representations of all objects upon a Plane*, (London, n.d.), p. iv.

<sup>25</sup> A question that Wittgenstein tackles at some length in relation to language and meaning. For the most succinct comment see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E. Anscombe, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1958) 504: 'But if you say "How am I to know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives?" I say: "How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either?"'

large number of works deal with the problematics associated with these questions, and address the 'fitness' of the image to the real in more complex ways.<sup>26</sup> One of the most exacting attempts to deal with these questions can be found in Adam Smith's essay 'Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called The Imitative Arts':

The works of the great masters in Statuary and Painting, it is to be observed, never produce their effect by deception. They never are, and it is never intended that they should be mistaken for the real objects which they represent. Painted Statuary may sometimes deceive an inattentive eye: proper Statuary never does. The little pieces of perspective in Painting, which it is intended should please by deception, represent always some very simple, as well as insignificant, object: a roll of paper, for example, or the steps of a staircase, in the dark corner of some passage or gallery.<sup>27</sup>

Smith insists on the fact that a representation is precisely that: a mediated presence. The charge of deception or falsehood is, therefore, unwarranted and unnecessary. Once one recognizes this the pleasure in seeing representations is precisely in the experience of recognition – that the image looks like the real object:

The proper pleasure which we derive from those two imitative arts, so far from being the effect of deception, is altogether incompatible with it. That pleasure is founded altogether upon our wonder at seeing an object of one kind represent so well an object of a very different kind, and upon our admiration of the art which surmounts so happily that disparity which Nature had established between them. The nobler works of Statuary and Painting appear to us a sort of wonderful phaenomena, differing in this respect from the wonderful phaenomena of Nature, that they carry, as it were, their own explication along with them, and demonstrate, even to the eye, the way and manner in which they are produced.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Some of these texts have already been discussed in Part I of this book; further discussion can be found in Thomas Reid, *Lectures on the Fine Arts*, ed. Peter Kivy (The Hague, 1973), pp. 46–7.

<sup>27</sup> Adam Smith, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. III, (Oxford, 1980), p. 184–5.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *The Glasgow Edition*, vol. III, p. 185. Mengs, in his *Sketches on the Art of Painting*, trans. from the Spanish by John Talbot Dillon (London, 1782) claims that the artist, in order to achieve the greatest effect and attain sublimity in his representation, must 'employ known appearances, and forms of perception beyond the line of possibility; and in these parts which he takes from nature, he must abstract all the signs of mechanism from nature itself' p. 17. Gilpin also argues against this: 'If indeed, either in literary, or in picturesque composition you endeavour to draw the reader, or the spectator from the subject to the mode of executing it, your attention disgusts at the same time, if some care, and pains be not bestowed on the execution, your slovenliness disgusts, as much. Tho perhaps the artist has more to say, than the man of letters, for paying attention to his execution. A truth is a truth, whether delivered in the language of a philosopher, or a peasant: and the intellect receives it as such.' *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on sketching Landscape* (London, 1792), p. 18. This position is very common in relation to the 'sublime style', which was generally taken to be impaired by the visibility of the mechanism of representation, and is as easily applied to poetry and music as visual art.

Not only *should* we see the image for what it is, an image, we *must* see it as such: as Smith explains, the wonder of a representation is that it comes accompanied by its own rules and protocols for decoding. The image, furthermore, not only says 'read me like this' it should express the means by which it has been produced. This is very close to our earlier comments on the distinction between discourses on and of something – it is an echo of our earlier definition of a discrete discourse – but it is also close to the methods of control and legislation used in the decoding of the image found in perspective theory. While there is no moral imperative in Smith's analysis, there is nevertheless a restriction: the difference being that it is the object – the image or statue – that tells the viewer how to proceed in the work of vision, and not the principles of perspective.

One might argue that this is small change, perhaps, merely a relocation of the legislative domain from the principles of production and their sustaining theory, to the product. However, this relocation does affect the position and construction of the subject.

While perspective theory, in its guise as an ethical system conditioning the subject, forces the viewer into one position, and exacts the price of an identification between the viewer and the artist thereby restricting the viewer's own creative potential,<sup>29</sup> Smith in his wonder at the image and willingness to allow it to tell the viewer how to proceed in the work of vision, allows the subject its own space. It is this work of vision, the defiguration of the image or statue, which produces the distance of the subject for and in itself, and correspondingly the resulting sensation from the work of vision is 'wonderment' 'astonishment' or the sublime sense of self:

The eye, even of an unskillful spectator, immediately discerns, in some measure, how it is that a certain modification of figure in Statuary, and of brighter and darker colours in Painting, can represent, with so much truth and vivacity, the actions, passions, and behaviour of men, as well as a great variety of other objects. The pleasing wonder of ignorance is accompanied with the still more pleasing satisfaction of science. We wonder and are amazed at the effect; and we are pleased ourselves, and happy to find that we can comprehend, in some measure, how that wonderful effect is produced. [III, 185]

What is being described here is the structure of the sublime: the sense of wonder which accompanies ignorance exists only to be transcended by the satisfaction of

<sup>29</sup> The problem is not quite as clear-cut as this, as later theorists take the presence of the subject as in part produced by the initial identification. In this case the viewer does not identify with the artist's person but with the sensations he was presumed to have felt at the time of painting. This more complex identification is familiar to us from the earlier discussion of the sublime, which follows precisely this progress. One example will suffice to make this larger point: it is from Gilpin's *Three Essays*, p. 50: 'Here and there a capital picture will raise these emotions: but oftener the rough sketch of a capital master. This has sometimes an astonishing effect on the mind: giving the imagination an opening into all those glowing ideas, which inspired the artist: and which the imagination only can translate.'

science. The sublime rush which accompanies the passage from ignorance to knowledge is here effected through the process of recognition – a recognition, in the final analysis, of the human body – and amounts to no less than a reflection of the body from the image or statue. Most notably, however, this recognition scene invests the subject with its sense of self: 'we are pleased ourselves'. Smith wishes to link this sense of self to the faculties of cognition, and to decrease the transcendent tendency of this experience in order to ground it in 'science'; but however much he may wish to do this the discursive excess is overwhelmingly present.

Smith prefers to stress a cognitive aspect of vision, and to maintain the predominance of the defigurative power articulated in the recognition of representation, in order to value the 'theory', or science, above the practice.<sup>30</sup> It is the knowledge of how a representation works that is important not the effect of it, be it sublime or not. This insistence on theory is brought out in his comments on the difference between a mirror and a picture. He explains that even though a mirror re-presents the objects before it more effectively than a pictorial representation, its power to raise wonder is depreciated because 'the "looking-glass itself does not at all demonstrate to the eye how this effect is brought about' [p. 185], even though an exterior body of knowledge, 'the science of optics', a theory is available to explain the effect.

The looking-glass merely reproduces the real, consequently the active mind becomes restless and bored with the constant repetition of the same trick:

In all looking-glasses the effects are produced by the same means, applied exactly in the same manner. In every different statue and picture the effects are produced; though by similar, yet not by the same means; and those means too are applied in a different manner in each. Every good statue and picture is a fresh wonder, which at the same time carries, in some measure, its own explication along with it. [III, 185]

The viewing subject is remade, reconstructed each time it witnesses a new and 'good' statue or picture; its sense of self is in the same fashion rearticulated, re-animating. This, we may reason from Smith, is why we enjoy representational forms, and also why we need them. We should return, however, to our central focus upon the positionality of the body in viewing in order to draw out as fully as possible the distinctions being made here by Smith from our earlier examples of perspective theory.

Self-image, or self-reflection could be said to be the horizon of unilinear perspective theory. Not only does the artist bathe in and parade his great accomplishment in being able to imitate reality, the viewer also luxuriates in the sensation of mastery as he places himself in the position of the artist. As we have

<sup>30</sup> Priestley held the opposite view, at least in so far as schoolchildren were concerned. He states: 'There is no occasion to trouble every boy with the theory of perspective; but I would have all young persons, without exception, made ready in the practice.' *A familiar Introduction*, p. xv.

seen, to become a viewing subject, to enter into the distance of the subject is, on the one hand, to experience one's own sense of self and of self in power. But on the other it is to be restricted and restrained by the law of perspective. The positionality of the body is so carefully policed it ultimately negates the subject's own power, and subjects it to the distance of the picture. In relation to the circuit of vision and transactions between the distances of the subject and the picture, the viewing of an image in a mirror is a special, and complex case. Mirror reflection initially appears to reinforce the sense of self, to seal the circuit of vision so that the distance of the picture is made precisely identical to the distance of the subject. On account of this it makes claims for being the most perfect form of representation, given that it imitates nature exactly: representation, for the mirror, is reflection.<sup>31</sup> Smith, however, cautions:

A looking-glass, besides, can represent only present objects; and, when the wonder is once fairly over, we choose, in all cases, rather to contemplate the substance than to gaze at the shadow. One's own face becomes then the most agreeable object which a looking-glass can represent to us, and the only object which we do not soon grow weary with looking at; it is the only present object of which we can see only the shadow: whether handsome or ugly, whether old or young, it is the face of a friend always, of which the features correspond exactly with whatever sentiment, emotion, or passion we may happen at that moment to feel.<sup>32</sup>

We may note from this that the only satisfaction to be gained from reflection is the recognition of the self as other, as the friend in the mirror whose face represents internal states of the self. This is to complicate the construction of the subject, but usefully, since without the 'looking-glass' – a term which self-articulates its complex connotations – the self, in Smith's comments, can only be seen as a shadow. Consequently, the subject is the only 'substance' that cannot be perceived as such: even in the mirror reflection the image is not of self but of other, which leads us to conclude that subjectivity is reflective, in between a

<sup>31</sup> The mirror articulates a number of crucial relations between self and other for the discursive network under examination throughout this book. It places the distances between self and other, or self and self-image in the scene of representation, and this distancing may have a number of disturbing effects. This is discussed in detail below in relation to the women's scene of reading. See pp. 266–78.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *The Glasgow Edition*, vol. III, p. 186. We have already noted the widespread assumptions about the legibility of the body in the action of oration. Here internal states are presumed to be represented by physiognomy, a theory put forward in most detail and with greatest elaboration by J. C. Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. Henry Hunter (London, 1789). See for example, p. 16: 'The Eye, the look, the mouth, the cheeks, the surface of the forehead, considered either in a state of absolute rest, or in the endless variety of their movements; in a word, all that is expressed by the term *Physiognomy*, is the most distinct, intelligible and lively display of internal feeling: of desire, passion, will; of all that constitutes the moral life, so superior to mere animal existence.'

shadow and a reflection of one's self as other.<sup>33</sup> This reasoning can only be taken as a reinforcement of the sense of self if one believes one's essential being to be outside the circuit of vision, unavailable to the normal means of empirical observation. Smith's comments about physiognomy are pertinent here since he suggests that internal states of mind are 'written' on the face, they take on substance at the level of the body.

Furthermore, representation becomes a more complex system once the place of the subject begins to interfere with the 'sight lines', the 'visual rays'<sup>34</sup> which were presumed to constitute the physical reality of vision, and this complexity becomes increasingly manifest as the temporal process of vision is taken into account. In viewing a complicated visual network which cannot be taken in 'at a glance', such as a landscape or a series of pictures, the 'true point of sight' shifts both spatially and temporally in ways that closely imitate the movement of the subject who views. In this way the time of sight is equated to the time of the subject; and the gaze of subject, its distance to the view, increasingly becomes the gaze in the subject, the look which bounds the view, stretched out through time, through the sense of self. It is this temporalization of the viewing experience to which we now turn.

As we have seen, works on perspective dictate the position of the viewer in front of the canvas, which is usually taken to be a transparent surface through which one looks past the representation to the real object. However, when the subject enters into the space of viewing, and is identified with the distance of the picture, the canvas may take on another function closer to that of the looking-glass discussed by Smith. If this happens the canvas becomes a mirror to subjectivity, giving back an image of the self to the self in vision. Perspective theory, however, attempts to negate the work of the eye and the identification of the distance of the subject with the distance of the picture; it places the spectator in precisely the position where no imagination is required in order to 'fix' the spatial relations. In this way it suspends and arrests the construction of the autonomous subject and prevents its leakage into the distance of the picture. As it does this it legislates all other positionalities, all other points of view; hence while it might outlaw these deviant practices of viewing it necessarily recognizes

<sup>33</sup> This applies to men: for women the case is usually perceived as rather different, and is explored in the chapter on reading. However, we may note here that a book intended for the improvement of women was entitled *The Ladies Mirror, or Mental Companion for the year 1786* in which the following comment can be found in the preface: '... in this manner we have pictured a MIRROR for the decoration of their face, we have equally so, as a mentor for the mind.' The mirror not only gives back self-image here, it also suggests that women need only look at that self-image for instruction.

<sup>34</sup> *The Artist's Assistant* defines them as 'Beams of light conveying the Likeness of any Object to the Eye or Sight, and the Knowledge thereof to the Mind or Understanding', p. 11.

that they are present as possibilities. It functions, in this way, as a legislative theory *par excellence*.

When the time of sight is introduced into this viewing matrix more complexities present themselves, most especially in regard to the differences and distances between the 'real' world and a representation of it. In viewing a landscape, for example, the time of sight clearly conditions the space of viewing as the spectator moves through 'the real'; the distance of the subject is, therefore, a coefficient of a temporalized viewing experience. This is markedly not the case in the viewing of a canvas which can be 'taken in at one glance'.<sup>35</sup> The mural or painted ceiling lies between these two extremes because it is usually too large or too distant to be taken in at one glance and from one point of sight. It is helpful, then, to turn to Joseph Highmore's *A critical examination of those two paintings on the ceiling of the Banqueting house at Whitehall: in which architecture is introduced, so far as relates to the perspective* because he discusses this from the standpoint of Brook Taylor's method. Having quoted Taylor's dictum that the rules of perspective cannot be dispensed with 'upon any account' he claims:

No Painting can appear perfectly true, unless seen from the Point intended by the Painter; because the Picture, being always considered as a transparent Surface, or Medium, through which the visual Rays are supposed to pass, if the Spectator changes his Situation, those Rays (*in Nature*) will intersect that Surface in different Points; and therefore (*in the Picture*), being determined to such certain Points, the Station of the Spectator becomes necessarily fixed, and unalterable; and the Picture must appear false seen otherwise; which may be illustrated as follows.<sup>36</sup>

Highmore goes on to explain that the ceiling is divided into nine distinct pictures 'evidently intended to be viewed singly, and having each its own proper Point of Sight, from which only it can be truly seen' [p. 3], thus determining that the

<sup>35</sup> Access to the 'text' of painting is also a matter for social and cultural privilege: if anyone and everyone can read a painting 'at a glance' then art loses some of its elitist value. Barry, for example, made this clear in his *An Account of a Series of Pictures in the Great Room of the Society of Arts, Manufacturers, and Commerce at the Adelphi* (London, 1783): 'The higher exertions of Art, as in Raphael, etc. require, for the developing of all their beauties, not only some degree of information in the spectator, but also that he considers them with some attention and study: . . . It is an absurdity to suppose, as some mechanical artists do, that the Art ought to be so trite, so brought down to the understanding of the vulgar, that they who run may read: when the Art is solely levelled to the immediate comprehension of the ignorant, the intelligent can find nothing in it, and there will be nothing to improve or to reward the attention even of the ignorant themselves, upon a second or third view: so much for what was wanting in Historical Art', pp. 23–4.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Highmore, *A critical examination of those two paintings on the ceiling of the Banqueting house at Whitehall: in which architecture is introduced, so far as relates to the perspective* (London, 1754), p. 1.

spectator move around the physical space of the room in order to view each picture sequentially. Here the insistence on the autonomy of each part is crucial and echoes many examples of instructions given for viewing landscapes.<sup>37</sup> It is this fragmentation of the image or the punctuation of the landscape which controls the temporal aspect of viewing, and which, in Highmore's example, eradicates the need for a theory that takes account of the impossibility of seeing everything at one go.

While Highmore finds this sequential view unproblematic, later theorists attempt to take such a fragmentary viewing experience into account, thereby breaking down the work of vision into distinct parts. This fracturing of the time of sight and the distance of the subject naturally leads to a corresponding fracturing of the subject: the self is not unique and produced all at once, it is not even the product of each point of view. Rather, it has a persistence, a residue which is carried over from point of sight to point of sight, one moment of production to the next; it not only has a spatial location, but also a temporal persistence. This feature of viewing 'in the real' is most forcefully exemplified in the

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Joseph Healy, *A description of Hagley, Envil and the Leasowes* (Birmingham, 1775) where the viewer is required to move from 'seat' to 'seat', and to view in only one direction, look only at certain features of the landscape, and, furthermore, read an inscription, usually by Pope or Thomson, in order to 'see' correctly the prospect in front of him, to see with the eyes of the specified poet. One was encouraged to 'read' a landscape as one read a book, a point made quite specifically by Lancelot Capabilly) Brown: 'Now THERE, (pointing a finger), I make a comma, and pointing to another spot where a more decided turn is proper, I make a colon; at another point (where an interruption is desirable to break the view), a parenthesis – now a full stop, and then I begin another subject', quoted by Hannah More in a letter to her sister, 31 Dec. 1782. The explicit reference made to the grammar and rhetorical ordering of texts not only serves to elevate the landscape gardener's art, it also demonstrates the full complexity of the act of viewing, and the demands it made on the viewer, not only to read the landscape correctly but to situate himself as and for subjectivity. The vogue for descriptions of landscapes and country houses can also be explained through reference to our controlling metaphor of a legislative theory over practice. See for further examples: Thomas Badeslade, *Thirty Six Views of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Seats* (London, 1750); Gilbert West, *Stowe, the Gardens of the Right Hon. Richard Lord Viscount Cobham. Address'd to Mr Pope* (London, 1732); William and John Halpenny, *The Country Gentleman's pocket companion* (London, 1753); Joseph Healy, *Letters on the Beauties of Hagley, Envil, and the Leasowes* (London, 1777); and a later example, John P. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen* (London, 1824); and for recent discussions of 'The Poetic Garden', Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression* (London, 1975), pp. 19–34; Christopher Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes, 1700–1750* (New York, 1967). In addition to these, two essays have come to my attention which require noting here: unfortunately not only this chapter but the entire book was written by the time I read them. They are both by Carole Fabricant, and are both extremely powerful: 'Binding and Dressing Nature's Loose Tresses: The Ideology of Augustan Landscape Design', in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 8 and 'The Literature of Domestic Tourism and the Public Consumption of Private Property', in *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (London, 1987).

comparison between looking at a landscape painting and at the 'real thing'.<sup>38</sup> In a real landscape the viewer moves through geographical space in order to experience various views and distances. If a landscape painting were to imitate nature precisely it would have to lead the eye around the canvas, in the same fashion as the eye of the spectator moves in or through the real.

While such a direct imitation of the landscape experience is not usually proposed, the structure of viewing a landscape painting should, it was claimed, analogically relate to the structure of viewing a real landscape. This analogical viewing experience is directly drawn from the part/whole sequential movement discussed in Highmore's *A critical examination*, and is explained below in terms of a doubled structure of appreciation, a doubled perspective of viewing. Thus, in J. H. Port's *An Essay on Landscape Painting* we find that pleasure in viewing a landscape is aroused by two distinct elements of the image:

In contemplating a picture, the pleasure received generally arises from one of two principal causes. Either from an immediate acknowledgement in the mind, of the skill of the painter, his knowledge, the grandeur of his ideas, the excellence of his pencilling, the effect and propriety of his colouring; and his power of forming a whole; or from the perception of a strong resemblance to nature; to scenes, the impression of which the mind retains, perhaps, without knowing exactly when they were received. In the first instance our admiration of the painter's abilities may take place principally; because, though the piece be well composed, well coloured etc yet little attention may have been paid to the detail of nature in its parts, to its delicate characters and graces. And in the second instance, the beautiful resemblance of nature may make the primary impression on the mind, although the scene shall not be any way remarkable; although the piece does not appear elaborate, neither testifies any particular or secret knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

This is close to Smith's notion of the self-decoding image, except that it separates out these two criteria: either one appreciates skill, or one appreciates resemblance to nature. The operation of separation, however, introduces time into the viewing experience, since the image, in itself, includes both its mimetic qualities and the traces of painterly skill: it is the viewer who must unrangle them both.

When the image itself becomes doubled in its attempts to combine more than one genre the surface of the representation runs the risk of displaying a certain disruption. This rupture of the smooth surface of the image is disquieting

<sup>38</sup> In landscape paintings the distance between the real and the apparent is more problematic than in history paintings, for example, where the subject dominates the image. The debates surrounding the differences between the genres are complex and would require too much detail to be discussed here. For the most useful account of this see John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven, Conn., 1986).

<sup>39</sup> J. H. Port, *An Essay on Landscape Painting* (London, 1782), pp. 9–11. The connections between this doubled approach to the image and the doubling of the reader in the scene of reading are important and will be elaborated upon in ch. 10.

because the viewer is unable to fix his sight on one of the images – the other keeps interfering. Moreover, this may not necessarily be the result of attempting to combine genres, as Port explains, when:

... two kinds of composition are united, I shall consider it in three points of view. First, where the landscape is subordinate to the historical design, being introduced either to exhibit local propriety, or merely to give a pleasing background, . . . this I think is the happiest, and indeed only proper union of the two branches; . . . In this case the landscape becomes the embellishment of the story, from which the eye does not wander till it has learned and considered the action represented: by these means, the effect of the piece as a whole, is greatly maintained, the transition to the parts is more easy, and the attention is not divided. On the contrary, where the painter's genius and abilities are most eminent in landscape, should he be tempted, when he has wrought his piece to perfection, to introduce some historical incident which is to be subordinate to the landscape, the consequence will be as exactly reversed, as this proposition is from the former: the advantages before enumerated, will not only be wanting, but defects intirely opposite will be admitted. And to consider it in the third point of view, should the interest of the piece be at all equally divided, it is needless to say that the eye must be distracted and unquiet; and one essential point will certainly be lost, the simplicity of the whole. [23–6]

Part, it would seem, must not distract from the whole, and this for a very good reason: the distance of the subject, if it is multiple, produces a multiple subject; a fractured image leads to a fractured consciousness; the decoding of the inharmonious combination of mixed genres produces an unstable subjectivity. Port argues against such mixing in order to propose a viewing situation in which the subject is seduced into its subjectivity and where the eye is taken into the painting, whether it be deceived or not, and led through the image. This movement of the eye does not echo that of the physical eye through a physical landscape, rather it represents an interior journey, from image to *imago*, from real to ideal, from the representation of the outer world to the experience of an inner sense of the self.

Thus, a picture should have an 'opening' through which the eye moves into the interior of the image. This notion could not be further away from the Albertian 'frame' through which one peers into the real world. Here the entrance is described in terms that we might want to read, following Freud, as indicative of a barely disguised sexuality:

An agreeable opening is necessary to every picture, the eye loves to be deluded on; but it is a common opinion with dealers and unskilful painters, that every landscape, be the subject what it may, must have a view of distant country for the back ground. This is absurd: for instance, in representing a forest scene, would it not give a far nobler idea of its depth and extent, if the eye was conducted thro' the natural openings or alleys, so that the scene should recede, yet without violating the subject, than where the distance, as it is called, is thrust all together into one corner of the picture, and suggests a totally new and foreign idea. [92–3]

This criticism of a conventionalized representational practice is, of course, an exercise of theory over practice. Its frustration with the 'common opinion' stems

from the overwhelming legislative power of perspective theory, for the 'distance', the marker which gives the eye the point required to take the measurement, take the distance between it and the canvases, and the canvases and the real world, has now become internalized within the subject. There is no violation of self because the subject takes to the image its self-awareness and self-knowledge: furthermore, the viewing situation allows and encourages that subject to penetrate to the depths of itself.

This doubled structure of sight in which the subject experiences itself is directly caused by the restrictive practices of perspective theory. By positioning the subject in only one place, the work of vision becomes reflected back onto the subject in vision, thereby creating a number of folds in the distances of the picture and the subject. This allows the subject to experience itself through time as a sequence of parts, not as a given and always united whole. These relations between the subject and the practice of viewing are attenuated according to the nature of the image. As with almost everything else the eighteenth century ordered its pictorial matter, in this case into 'high' and 'low' grades of image.

The argument over the relative merits of the genres is a complex one which need not detain the argument unduly. In very broad brush-strokes the following sketch outlines the main points. English art during the eighteenth century was focused on the production of genre paintings, given that English artists, as it was commonly held, were not the rival of their Italian or even French contemporaries. Most importantly English artists were deemed unable to match the great history painters of the various Italian schools, and therefore the highest form of pictorial representation, so-called history painting, was thought to be beyond their reach.

During the same period a reordering between genres took place, so that portraiture came to take second place to history painting, with landscape and low life genre taking third and fourth place. Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1725) is generally referred to as the first serious attempt made to effect this revision in order of the categories of painting, while James Thornhill and George Vertue are usually upheld as the exceptions to the rule, and are taken as the foremost representatives of an English school of history painting.

I do not wish to examine this topic in any detail – it is, as one might expect, more complex than this sketch might suggest – but to place the theory of perspective within a context of the production and commodification of pictures. Whether or not the hierarchy was as rigid as suggested above, or whether certain painters belonged to one category or another does not matter, since my interest lies in the 'rule of taste', the fashions which determined the eighteenth-century context for pictorial production and consumption. This is also an extremely diverse and far-reaching topic which will only be glanced at here. Our means of entry into it will be determined by the preceding discussion of the distances of the subject and the picture: if, as I have argued at some length, perspective theory determines the place and space of the subject, if the distance

of the subject is legislated by the rules of perspective drawing, then how and to what extent did this affect the consumption of visual images?

Two brief examples will have to suffice here, one taken from the mid-century and concerning the first public exhibitions of paintings in England, and the other from the furthest end of our period concerning portraiture and the distinction between genres. While it is clear that paintings had been hung in private households, sometimes specifically in galleries, for over two centuries, the first public exhibition of paintings in England took place on 21 April 1760 in one room belonging to the Royal Society of Arts and Manufactures in its premises on the Strand.<sup>40</sup> The show lasted until 8 May during which time 6582 catalogues were sold at 6d each. There were one hundred and thirty exhibits, and probably a daily attendance of over one thousand visitors.<sup>41</sup> The first exhibition had been inspired by the earlier example of the Foundling Hospital: Hogarth had donated pictures to the hospital, and had encouraged other artists to do the same, in order to attract spectators who might then donate something to the hospital charity.

There was a widespread dissatisfaction among artists and connoisseurs about the state of British art in general and painting in particular throughout the 1740s and 50s, and these early exhibitions should be seen in relation to the debates occasioned by it. One of the most prominent areas of discussion was the proposal to found a public Academy of Arts. The issues involved here intersect very obviously with the discussion of chapter 4, on the fusion of national identity with personality. It is also very clear that ethical as well as aesthetic considerations impinged upon the desire for a healthy state of national artistic production. J. Gwynn, for example, in his *An Essay on Design including proposals for erecting a public Academy to be supported by voluntary subscription* (London, 1755) claims that the effects of such an institution would stretch beyond the encouragement of artists in the country to the general ethical improvement of all:

In this light our Academy will be as useful as *Westminster Abbey*; for it will set before our View those very Actions that gave our Heroes Monuments. Here a young Peer will see those Heroisms of his Ancestors delineated, that exalted them above the rest of their Contemporaries; . . . Every wise State, but particularly the Romans, well knew the good Effect of these Representations, to excite the Mind to a Sense of public Virtue.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> For a history of the gallery see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 100–2.

<sup>41</sup> These details are taken from Sidney C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy* (London, 1968).

<sup>42</sup> J. Gwynn, *An Essay on the necessity and form of a Royal Academy for Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (London, 1764), p. 20. This is a second edition, slightly altered, of the *Essay on Design* published in 1755. Hutchison attributes it to John Nesbitt, following the cataloguing of the Royal Academy library, but this is incorrect.

It was not until 1769 that the Royal Academy was given its charter a full eight years after the first public exhibition. These years witnessed a considerable amount of jostling within the artistic community for grace, favour and royal patronage. Various societies were founded which merely intensified the rivalry already in place between the different schools set up specifically to teach drawing and so on. When the first exhibition was mounted it appears to have been extremely popular, a fact which led to certain difficulties in the disposition of the paintings and the access a spectator had to view them. This point will be reinforced below, but a further feature of the first exhibition also needs to be commented upon, here explained by Edward Edwards in his *Anecdotes of painters*:

The success of this first public display of art was more than equal to general expectation. Yet there were some circumstances, consequent to the arrangement of the pictures, with which the artists were very justly dissatisfied: they were occasioned by the following improprieties. The society, in the same year, had offered premiums for the best painting of history, and landscape; and it was one of the conditions, that the pictures produced by the candidates should remain in their great room for a certain time; consequently they were blended with the rest, and formed part of the exhibition. As it was soon known which performances had obtained the premiums, it was naturally supposed, by such persons who were deficient in judgment, that those pictures were the best in the room, and consequently deserved the chief attention.<sup>45</sup>

Concern over the positioning of the pictures is a common feature of these early exhibitions, leading in one case to Gainsborough's refusal to show at the Academy Summer exhibition, noted below. The further point made above, that a 'common' audience was unable to form correct judgment, is also noteworthy. These early exhibitions were entrepreneurial activities by which the artists gained access to a public who might buy their pictures. If, as seems to have been the case, these exhibitions turned into *social* events whereby one might meet an attractive partner or indulge in licentious conversation, then the primary economic function of the occasion would be diluted – this because the crowds of 'improper' people restricted access to the image and decreased the chance of a wealthy 'proper' person admiring, and purchasing, the painting.

The connection, then, between money, aesthetic value and sound judgment is made right from the beginning of public exhibitions. The question over position is, therefore, not only caught up within the distances of the spectator and of the picture, it also *displays* value: its *position* tells the ignorant or tasteless viewer that the image is valuable, tasteful. These subtleties are acknowledged by Edwards, continuing from the last citation:

Nor were they pleased with the mode of admitting the spectators, for every member of the society had the discretionary privilege of introducing as many persons as he chose, by

<sup>45</sup> Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of painters* (London, 1808), p. xxv.

means of gratuitous tickets; and consequently the company was far from being select, or suited to the wishes of the exhibitors. [xxvi]

In order to restrict entry, therefore, a charge was levied for entrance to the second public exhibition, held in Spring Garden, which opened on 9 May 1761. Edwards comments:

Here they found it necessary to change their mode of admission, which they did in the following method. The catalogue was the ticket of admission; consequently, one catalogue would admit a whole family in succession, for a shilling, which was its price. But this mode of admittance was still productive of crowd and disorder, and it was therefore altered the next year. [xxvii]

By the time of the third exhibition, a year later, the admission price rose to one shilling per person, the so called 'academic shilling' charged for the ensuing Royal Academy exhibitions, and was justified by Johnson in a preface to the catalogue. He writes: 'Of the price put upon this exhibition some account may be demanded. Whoever sets his work to be shewn, naturally desires a multitude of spectators; but his desire defeats its own end, when spectators assemble in such numbers as to obstruct one another' [xxviii].

Here viewing 'in the real' causes considerable friction with the theory laid down by works on perspective. It would have been almost impossible to occupy the true point of sight in the crowded room with people constantly entering the distance between canvases and spectator. Indeed, it is surely likely that the enormous popularity of these events attracted people for a number of reasons completely unconnected with the correct viewing of the image. A poem published in 1775 entitled 'The exhibition of painting, addressed to the ladies', describes the occasion in social terms and makes allusion to the seductive erotic space created in the exhibition rooms. According to this source women should go to see pictures in order to enter into playful conversation, in a new, highly charged public space, with a handsome stranger in order to learn something of taste:

Confess – (nor blush to have it known)  
That by his taste you've form'd your own.  
If merit, sense, and taste, combin'd  
Adorn, and dignify his mind:  
O'er yours, if his sweet converse pour  
Some fresh instruction ev'ry hour –  
Is it not glorious, to improve,  
By lessons from the lips of love?

These contradictions and frictions were identified very early on, as we can note from Johnson's preface to the catalogue for the second exhibition of 1762:

Though we are far from wishing to diminish the pleasure, or depreciate the sentiments of any class of the community, we know, however, what every one knows, that all cannot be judges or purchasers of works of art. Yet we have already found by experience, that all are

desirous to see an exhibition. When the terms of admission were low, our room was throng'd with such multitudes, as made access dangerous, and frightened away those, whose approbation was most desired.<sup>44</sup>

Not only was the room full of people, however, it was also packed with pictures, hung from floor to ceiling (see illustration). This second point about the early exhibitions is of obvious importance to our discussion of the distances required to view. If we take as accurate the illustration by Rowlandson of an Academy exhibition we can note some of the features of the hanging policy. Firstly, large canvases were hung high on the wall and at an angle. This makes perfect sense since a large picture cannot be seen at eye level if there is a very large crowd in front of it. The corollary of this was to hang the small pictures, nearly always portraits, at eye level. The Academy seems to have maintained this as a policy throughout the period. The second feature which is notable is the maintenance of an uninterrupted line around the room which marks the boundary between the larger canvases hung at an angle and the smaller ones at eye level. This was termed 'the line', and a picture was said to 'hang on the line' when the top of its frame reached to the line. G. D Leslie comments upon this:

People still speak of pictures being hung 'on the line', but very few indeed, even amongst the present members themselves, know the origin of the term; the common belief that it implies a place on the walls on a level with a spectator's eye is more or less correct; but when the Exhibitions were held in Somerset House and Trafalgar Square, the term meant something far more definite. In those days people not only spoke of pictures being hung 'on the line' but 'above the line' and 'below the line'. 'The line' was then a regular and permanent fixture: it was a horizontal line exactly eight feet from the floor, marked by a projecting ledge that left the surface of the wall below it two inches in advance of that which was above it.<sup>45</sup>

This line constituted a visible boundary, a mark which delimited the space on the wall for hanging different kinds and sizes of picture. Leslie continues:

The rule in old times that all very large pictures, as well as whole-lengths and half-length portraits, had to be placed above the line, the bottom of their frames resting on the ledge



Private View at a Summer Exhibition by Thomas Rowlandson, *Anderton Volume 1769*, Royal Academy Library; reproduced by kind permission of the Royal Academy of Arts.

<sup>44</sup> p. xviii. The same thing happened with the Academy exhibitions which were free at first. The catalogue for the twelfth, held in 1780, carries the following advertisement: 'As the present Exhibition is a Part of the Institution of an Academy supported by Royal Munificence, the public may naturally expect the Liberty of being admitted without any Expence.

The Academicians therefore think it necessary to declare, that this was very much their desire, but that they have not been able to suggest any other means, than that of receiving money for Admittance, to prevent the Rooms from being filled by improper Persons, to the entire Exclusion of those for whom the Exhibition is apparently intended.' *Catalogue of The Royal Academy* (1780). Quite who constituted a 'proper' and who an 'improper' person is not stated.

<sup>45</sup> G.D. Leslie. *The inner life of the Royal Academy* (London, 1914), pp. 74-5.



which marked the line, but no lower. The line was then preserved level, no pictures breaking through it either from above or below, although in some very exceptional cases this rule was, by permission of the Council, held in abeyance. [76]

As artists submitted their pictures for the annual exhibitions in the full light of this stricture it must have determined to some extent the size and subject of their submissions. Gainsborough's argument with the hanging committee suggests that not all artists were convinced of the merit of this policy, while they must have all recognized that the location of the picture in the exhibition was crucial.<sup>46</sup> In this sense the earlier complaint about the prize pictures remaining in the exhibition room becomes productive once again, since the line around the wall displayed to the spectator a boundary, a limit. To hang above it meant one thing, and below another.

This brings in the second point I want to make here about the consumption of the visual image, the difference between the genres. Portraiture, for example, is clearly more restricted in its possible uses than still life, more rigidly tied to identificatory impulses than history paintings, and more obviously susceptible to social uses than landscape. To display a portrait has clear social motives; the same might be said of landscapes if it is clear that the representation depicts a view which has some direct relation to the owner of the picture – if it is a view of a tract of land he owns for example. In the case of history paintings the moral dicta they were generally taken to represent were often supposed to be indicative and expressive of their owners' civic virtue.

This latter type of painting presents us with a number of difficulties in relation to the positioning of the subject, the primary object of perspective theory. But it also provides us with a possible answer to the question of the persistence of perspective theories, their repetition over an entire century. As far as we can tell, history paintings, and to a lesser extent portraits and landscapes, were widely regarded not only as images to be consumed, viewed, but also as texts to be read, as bearers of specific meanings. An entire tradition of commentary on

<sup>46</sup> Gainsborough argued with the Academy in 1783 over the proposed hanging of his submissions, a set of small ovals of George III, Queen Charlotte and their thirteen children. Gainsborough was unhappy at the prospect of their being hung above the line. The following year he sent in eighteen works, among them a portrait 'The Three Eldest Princesses', a full length. Gainsborough again requested that the picture be hung below the line: 'Mr Gainsborough Compts to the Genm of the Committee, & begs pardon for giving them so much trouble; but as he has painted this Picture of the Princesses in so tender a light, that notwithstanding he approves very much of the established Line for Strong Effects, he cannot possibly consent to have it placed higher than five feet & a half, because the likeness & Work of the Picture will not be seen any higher; therefore, at a Word, he will not trouble the Gentlemen against their Inclination, but will beg the rest of his Pictures back again'. Gainsborough never showed at the Academy again. These details are taken from John Hayes, *Thomas Gainsborough*, (The Tate Gallery, 1980), p. 36.

the subjects of various paintings, statuary and so forth, and their specific positions in country houses bear witness to an extremely well defined semiotics of the pictorial. Patrons of the arts very commonly commissioned particular subjects in order to produce new meanings or complement existing ones produced by the semiotic system that was their art collection. The problematics of sight, as we have described them, and the resulting positioning of the subject were, in this instance, entirely subjected to the power of the text, to its meaning. In this light we can see the continual repetition of perspective theory as a counter-tradition, emphasizing the viewer over the image, ownership of the subject over ownership of the values and morals presented in the image, recognition of the individual body over the collective social body. However, perspective theory is ambivalent on this, since its insistence on the identification of the viewer with the painter may be in the service of the opposite ideology of the subject, precisely its limitation to the circuit of vision delimited by the values and ethics embedded within the image. This is to note that perspective theory, as are all discrete discourses within the network we are investigating – the network of the subject – is within contestation; it is open to appropriation, can be made to speak in the service of competing and contradictory interests. Consequently, one of its effects is to produce a description of the subject which becomes instrumental in the overthrow of those augustinian ideals of civic *politesse* referred to above.

In relation to this the genre known throughout the eighteenth century as the 'conversation piece' requires comment, since its predominant characteristic was to display a person or persons in their own 'habitat', in the house, workshop, garden or whatever, and usually engaged in some semi-private or familiar activity, from playing cards to performing some kind of work task.<sup>47</sup> The genre appears to have become fashionable in the late 1720s, but it reached its peak in the work of Hogarth, Zoffany and others in mid-century. It is defined by Vertue in the following way:

pieces of Conversations – family peeces – small figures from the life in their habits and dress of the Times. well disposed graceful and natural easy actions suitable to the characters of the persons and their portraitures well toucht to the likeness and Air, a free pencill good Colouring and ornamented or decorated in a handsom grand manner every way Suitable to people of distinction.<sup>48</sup>

The genre shares some characteristics with portraiture, but its most important aspect is its portrayal of ownership: the person or persons displayed are demonstrating their ownership of land, or house, skill or whatever. It is in

<sup>47</sup> The genre can be found discussed at greater length in Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, pp. 121–36.

<sup>48</sup> George Vertue, *Works*, III, 81.

relation to this sign of property that the remarks on perspective become significant, for what this immensely popular low genre painting does is precisely reconstruct the distance of the subject in relation to property and propriety: when one views this kind of canvas the immediate context brought to mind is precisely that in which one's identity is recognized through ownership, of land or buildings, of a 'profession' or trade, of beauty or serenity or any number of other qualities: the picture places one in the distance of the subject, and requires that the viewer (re)construct his or her own identity. The fashionable and popular pastime of displaying these pictures articulates these relations of ownership and discourses of propriety, of subjection. To offer an image of oneself, for example, engaged in a pastime which gives one a place, definition, is to state that one is someone: to regard an image of someone else engaged in a pastime one might regard as 'low' or demeaning is also to experience one's self as a somebody.

Portraiture, which became the dominant form of pictorial representation during the second half of the century, also articulates these forms of propriety relationships, but the complexities of the distance of the subject and the distance of the picture are somewhat greater. When one stands facing a portrait one is immediately led into the relations of ownership so clearly displayed in the conversation piece: to place oneself at the true point of sight in front of a portrait is to capture the likeness of the sitter, to master the image, and enter into a profoundly disturbing economics of vision. For, while the viewer may look improperly upon the portrait, the sitter is denied his or her reflective look: one may stare a portrait in the eye when one may not a real person.

This economics of vision is complicated still further by the activity of sitting for a portrait, which was an immensely popular pastime for both men and women. The difficulties we have encountered in the preceding discussion of perspective theory concerning the production and ownership of the self are also further complicated in this activity. Issue number 19 of *The World* makes the point economically: 'We are easily delighted with pictures of ourselves, and are sometimes apt to fancy a strong likeness where there is not even the least resemblance.'<sup>49</sup> The procedures of recognition associated with images of self are clearly positioned within the network of discourses we have been discussing throughout, and are indisputably connected to the notions of personality, propriety and property we have encountered in theories of elocution and perspective. The author of this essay, however, laments the proliferation of portraiture, and remarks about the poor quality of 'modern' portrait painters: '... our modern artists (if we may guess from the motley representations they give us of our species) are so far from having studied the natures of other people, that they seldom seem to have the least acquaintance with themselves' [2]. To

<sup>49</sup> *The World*, no. 9 (10 May 1753).

know oneself is a necessary requirement for picturing others; but this stricture carries along with it the notion that the practice of portrait painting involves rather more than rendering a 'true likeness': it participates within the production and construction of person, of both the subjectivity of the artist and of the sitter. This inter-subjective activity is commented upon at some length in Hazlitt's essay 'On sitting for one's picture', which although it hails from a slightly different historical context can usefully help us in summing up the complexities involved in the situation.<sup>50</sup>

The first point of importance made by Hazlitt concerns the visual analogue of sitting for a portrait: sitting in front of a mirror. The central difference between the two is that the mirror reflects the 'true' image, whereas the portrait painter 'is sensible of her charms, and does all (he) can to fix or heighten them'<sup>51</sup>, and the image produced, therefore, is most likely to improve upon the original. Hazlitt goes on to remark that 'the having one's picture painted is like the creation of another self' [XII, 108], so that the connections between personality, propriety and property are forcefully recognized. However, this creation of an alternative self is, in part at least, also one of the ways in which one might arrive at self-knowledge:

The sitter, by his repeated, minute, *faded* inquiries about himself may be supposed to take an indirect and laudable method of arriving at self-knowledge; and the artist, in self-defence, is obliged to cultivate a scrupulous tenderness towards the feelings of his sitter, lest he should appear in the character of a spy upon him. [XII, 108]

This summons up a series of problems associated with the actual situation of portrait painting, and which tend towards the articulation of various economies of sexuality, given the potentially improper manner in which the painter regards his sitter. As Hazlitt remarks:

The relation between the portrait-painter and his amiable sitters is one of established custom; but it is also one of metaphysical nicety, and is a running *double entendre*. The fixing an inquisitive gaze on beauty, the heightening a momentary grace, the dwelling on the heaven of an eye, the losing one's-self in the dimple of a chin, is a dangerous employment. The painter may chance to slide into the lover – the lover can hardly turn painter. [XII, 112]

These comments bear out our earlier arguments about the distance of the picture and the distance of the subject: here the portrait painter enters into both spaces, objectifies his sitter, and produces the possibility of an improper

<sup>50</sup> Comments on sitting for portraits can be found in the periodical literature of the second half of the eighteenth century but they do not express with such precision and economy the difficulties articulated by the activity.

<sup>51</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Works*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London, 1931), XII, 108.

production of his own subjectivity according to the wiles of his desire, with a corresponding improper abduction through seduction of the subject sitting. On account of this the portrait painter must take precautions so that he resists the temptations offered:

There is no doubt that the perception of beauty becomes more exquisite ('till the sense aches at it') by being studied and refined upon as an object of art – it is at the same time fortunately neutralised by this means, or the painter would run mad. It is converted into an abstraction, an *ideal* thing, into something intermediate between nature and art, hovering between a living substance and a senseless shadow. [XII, 113]

Once the transformation of the real into the ideal has been effected, the painter is free to gaze with all his desire upon the image he creates, even endowing the image with its own animation:

The heath and spirit that but now breathed from a speaking face, the next moment breathe with almost equal effect from a dull piece of canvas, and thus distract attention: the eye sparkles, the lips are moist there too; and if we can fancy the picture alive, the face in its turn fades into a picture, a mere object of sight. We take rapturous possession with one sense, the eye; but the artist's pencil acts as a non-conductor to the grosser desires. Besides, the sense of duty, of propriety interferences. [XII, 113]

Hazlitt makes it more than clear that the practice of portrait painting is deeply implicated within the construction of the subject: not only does the painter 'capture' a likeness, render a personality on the canvas, and thereby hypostatize it for posterity, he also participates in the construction of his own selfhood through the resistance to and articulation of his desires.

The final position arrived at by Hazlitt states that a woman painter at work on a portrait of a man is performing nothing less than a declaration of her intentions toward her subject: 'the sitting to a lady for one's picture is a still more trying situation, and amounts (almost of itself) to a declaration of love!' [XII, 114]

While the problems that arise in relation to portrait paintings are not restricted to the actual practice of painting – they surface in the viewing of all kinds of pictures – they are most intense in the example of the portrait since the distance of the subject may not only be entered into by the artist, but also by the viewer. Given this the portrait itself may 'master' the viewer; it may be so good a likeness, so 'real' that the viewer is taken in by the picture. Hazlitt, once again, gives us an instructive account of the viewing experience in terms which will be proleptic of the following account of the reading scene.

Writing about the principal galleries of England Hazlitt informs us:

We know of no greater treat than to be admitted freely to a collection of this sort, where the mind reposes with full confidence in its feelings of admiration, and find that idea and love of conceivable beauty, which it has cherished perhaps for a whole life, reflected from every object around it. It is a cure (for the time at least) for low-thoughted cares and uneasy passions. We are abstracted to another sphere: we breathe empyrean air; we enter into the

minds of Raphael, of Titian, of Poussin, of the Carracci, and look at nature with their eyes: we live in time past, and seem identified with the permanent form of things.<sup>52</sup>

This interpositioning of the subject is, in Hazlitt's typical style, enmeshed within an erotics of the viewing scene:

We sometimes, in viewing a celebrated collection, meet with an old favourite, a *first love* in such matters, that we have not seen for many years, which greatly enhances the delight. We have, perhaps, pampered our imaginations with it all that time; its charms have sunk deep into our minds; we wish to see it once more, that we may confirm our judgment, and renew our vows. [7]

Perspective theory, then, imagines a viewing scene and generates a theoretical description of the practice which erases almost entirely the 'real'. It creates a fantasy of the identification of the viewer with the painter, an imaginative practice it has no trouble at all legislating. In fact, if we take Hazlitt at his word, the spectating scene is fraught with dangerous identificatory impulses, and, following Johnson's account of the first exhibitions, encourages, if not creates, a licentious, improper public space. Perspective theory is clearly cognizant of these dangerous liminal cases but chooses to evert them, to place a real practice outside its theoretical account of the viewing scene. Something of the complexities of this, and of the connections between this theory of viewing and a theory of reading can be glimpsed in the image that follows.

## 9

### A Licentious Portrait

An unexceptional domestic scene; a coherent picture of the past; an image of the real, perhaps, even an image picturing to itself an image of the real. A common enough representation, even a trope of Western pictorial art. The artist placed in the position of the recorder of reality, wielding and articulating the languages of pictorial representation, struggling to utilize only a colourless medium permitting the transference of visual reality to the canvas without distortion; world becomes image, object becomes representation. The problematic, if we can use such a loaded term here, is familiar enough; we need rehearse merely a couple of names, Plato and Apelles. In our own recent intellectual history the image is even more familiar, for it echoes, though by no means reproduces, the complexities of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. And still closer to this opening, it recalls, of course, Foucault's meditation upon that representation of representation in *The Order of Things*.

I begin here, then, in order to summon up a problematic and to signal the point of departure for the following. In our downgraded image of the representation of representation, the faded echo of the problematic, we do not find the artist starting out of the frame, positioning us as spectators in front of the mystery of representation. Rather, sight and insight are internalized within the economy of the image, and unlike the economy in Velazquez's image there is no displaced surplus demanding to be placed, no vacancy which embarrasses the eye into its identification with the disturbance of the surplus; our image is full, its visual transactions are complete, so that the eye is not invited within, but excluded from the play and place of the image.

We note, however, that someone does look out of the frame, does glance askance towards the space outside, but it is not the image maker. He in fact pretends to be looking at this person who gazes away from him as much as she gazes away from us. More precisely, the artist is looking across the space between the canvas and the sitter, articulating the distance of the picture he is creating – that space required between the canvas and the object of representation in order to fit the object within the perimeter of the canvas with correct proportion – in

<sup>52</sup> [William Hazlitt], *Sketches of the principal galleries in England* (London, 1824), p. 4.

such a fashion that we are excluded from *his* position of sight, and are placed outside the network of visual transactions that are presented in the picture. We have, then, a slightly different play from the deception of *Las Meninas* where the spectator is invited to take up one or two positions within the framed image and at least one outside it. As we know from the large secondary literature surrounding Velazquez's masterpiece all these positionalities are games or puzzles intended to amuse and trick the viewer. At their furthest edge they state quite categorically a problematic, a distance between the real and the image, the representation and the represented: in fact we are most comfortable reading that image as primarily an image of image making, a representation of representation. This is not to say that an entire network of social, economic, and political discourses does not also surround and penetrate the image. Nor is it to say that the image is exhausted by reading it entirely within the framework of this clearly stated problematic.

So much for the set of difficulties proposed by *Las Meninas*. But what of the difficulties, should there be any, posed by our lower level image, by this cheap print of a typical domestic scene? The interior seems legible enough: the artist sits at the canvas, left leg motioning towards his subject giving trajectory to his entire body which is obliquely positioned to the blank space on which he crafts his representation of the real. His palette plainly in view held by the left hand and his right hand poised at a particular point in the making of the image, the temporal hiatus in which the image is suspended, precisely the instant at which he completes his representation of the book.

Above him two busts direct the spectator's gaze; the male head closest to the periphery of the image stares in the direction of the sitter, who continues the direction of the gaze out of the left side of the frame. This line of sight is complemented by the the intersecting line from the female head, which suggests a trajectory from her to the artist. Unlike the first sight line, however, it does not continue beyond the frame. On the wall a canvas depicting a madonna and child clearly competes with the unfinished image upon the easel, and signals a further possible internalized line of sight designed to draw the viewer's eye towards the subject of the portrait. That sight line is suggested by the mother's looking at her child, which, were it to be continued beyond its own frame, points towards the woman sitting below who is clearly absorbed in her pursuit.

So it comes about that the visual transactions are balanced within the economy of image and vision: eyes point towards different sections of the image, leading the eye of the viewer around the perimeter and through the image, exhausting all possible spaces within the frame. It is, we can hardly fail to note, an image of someone painting and is far from unusual in this respect: the image reflects the activity engaged in by the artist, therefore the self-reflection of the image should not disturb its smooth surface. Indeed, this is far from a busy pictorial space; almost nothing seems to disrupt its ordered positionings, nothing seems to ruffle its quiet calm self-reflection. Consequently the spectator consumes the image



Frontispiece from *The Female Guardian*, 1784, Hope 8° 381; reproduced by kind permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

with effortless ease: it is, after all, merely a frontispiece for a popular work on moral conduct: a pleasing illustration to divert the eye before the real work of reading begins, the work of instruction and edification that will result from the studied perusal of the text. Yet something does tear the seam of the image, perhaps too softly and subversively to be consciously appreciated at first glance, but nevertheless present in the full parabola of the image.

This small margin of disquiet is most easily recognized when we stop to consider the activities that are being pursued: portrait painting figures as the most prominent, with sitting for a portrait as the necessary complement, but the third activity, that of reading a book, seems almost out of place. Indeed, the relaxed yet nevertheless charged attitude of the artist, designed to register both his distance from the subject and his 'proper' seductive interest in the sitter, indicates to us, the voyeuristic spectators of this scene, that something is being represented which perhaps should not be. Moreover, the artist's smirk of pleasure is balanced by the sitter's furious indignation – could we mistake indignation for concentration? – as she has been forced to stare out of the image, across the frame and in precisely the opposite direction to that which would enable her to follow the progress of her own representation, witness her coming into representation. For it is, of course, on the canvas where the real of representation is taking place, and that space is tantalizingly close to her peripheral vision were she to be staring in the opposite direction. Yet she is denied access to the picture plane even as she presumes her image, her true likeness, to be coming into representation there: she presumes herself to be precisely the *object* of attention, the subject of representation, and as such she cannot look, cannot measure the distance between herself and her image as the artist does. To be placed within the image is to lose subjectivity even as one's image is made more 'true to life' than life itself.<sup>1</sup>

However, when we look a little more closely it is not merely the fact that she cannot respond to the seductive gaze of her employee, the servant bought to 'capture' or 'take' her likeness, translate her visage into image, and is therefore unable to participate to the full extent in the play of this charming scene of capital exchange, but, more disturbingly, that she cannot witness the appearance of her likeness, which, as if by some magician's art, emerges from the blank canvas as the artist works away at his task of bringing the real into the representation. For, what she is debarred from seeing is precisely the activity of the artist, who,

<sup>1</sup> The crux of portrait painting is precisely this notion of a 'true likeness'. The most succinct form of the various problems that surround the debates about the accuracy of portraiture that I have come across is E. H. Gombrich's quotation of Max Lieberman's retort to a dissatisfied sitter: 'This painting, my dear Sir, resembles you more than you do yourself' cited in *Art, Perception, and Reality*, a collection of papers by E. H. Gombrich, Julian Hochberg and Max Black (Baltimore, 1972), p. 46.

we can now see so clearly, is not painting her but the woman sitting behind her reading.

This woman, we can assume, is inferior in rank: she wears the mob cap of a maid and seems to be attending the scene rather than participating within it. She appears absorbed, even bored by her reading, which we can infer would have been aloud. Her purpose, then, is to distract or amuse the artist and her mistress. Perhaps she has been requested to divert her lady's attention from the tedious business at hand. But who has requested her attendance, the artist or the sitter? Has the artist in fact stipulated as part of his contract that amusement should be provided while he performs his labours? These questions are compounded by further queries concerning the moral force of the image, questions that arise because the image is placed as a frontispiece for a work on moral conduct. What, then, does the image set out to tell us, and is this distanced from what we take it to be telling us?

Once we begin to ask these kinds of questions it becomes increasingly obvious that what we are looking at is very far from a balanced economy of sight and image, and that the image does not necessarily picture to us the representation of the real. On the contrary it would appear to present an image of the deceit involved in representation. This deceit is the very subject of the picture, for what we see being performed by the maid, the real subject of the artist's labours and attentions, see but cannot hear, is aural distraction, the decoy that leads the sitter's attention away from the image being produced by the artist, precisely in the direction out of the frame of the entire picture. Has the artist, then, requested that the maid read aloud – a conscious ploy to distract the sitter from noticing his intent preoccupation with his illicit subject? Perhaps he has set up the scene deliberately, requesting the sitter to present her 'best side', playing to her vanity, feeding her self-image, so that she can but barely register the oblique glance of the artist's eye. Indeed, the arrangement of these bodies is so careful that the sitter can only just register in her peripheral vision the direction of the artist's gaze; only just compute its trajectory. What she cannot see, however, is the placing of her maid who sits completely out of her line of vision, behind her head in fact. Thus, while she imagines that the artist measures the distance between herself and canvas, the distance of the picture, the artist really gazes upon the maid, measuring the distance of his desire.

However, while the sitter takes herself to be the object of the artist's gaze, the maid is preoccupied in her activity of reading, and therefore cannot register the artist's rapt attention. What activity could be better for his purposes, then, than reading: an activity which demands concentration to such an extent that one abstracts oneself, eradicating all traces of person in order to bring into speech as fully as possible the voice of the dead text. The maid, then, could never suspect that it is her image, her subject that is being captured on the canvas. Indeed, she is naturally expected by her mistress to neutralize her presence – again, what activity but reading aloud could so effectively erase her presence, placing the

text in her 'read as she speaks with the voice of the text – just as she expects herself to be ignored by the artist's attention.

An economy, an image of transaction and of deception, of not getting what one pays for: these are the moral lessons being invoked. Yet there is more here than just *moral force*: we should also note the spacings of the body, the distances between the artist's body and that of the representation on the canvas; between the sitter's proud erect form and the maid's arduous attentive gesture; between the mother's cradling arms and her son's calm repose. Everywhere the image pictures the distances of various bodies, of trajectory, of physical space. These are the spaces, the gestures and attitudes we must read if we are to arrive at a full decoding of this image.

Let us begin with the canvas, which errs in its attempt to present the real, for the maid's physique is in fact larger than life: from our distance to the image we can note that the painter has magnified his subject, he has distorted the rules of perspective and enlarged his subject in order to place himself face to face with his unsuspecting sitter. The distance of desire magnifies the image on the canvas, but it also enlarges the distance of the picture, for, as we shall see, it is precisely this space which allows the subject its space of representation. Between the artist and his subject a mediating bodily presence intervenes, precisely the image he creates. For, if we inspect the angles closely we note that the maid sits behind the canvas, out of sight, beyond the gaze of the seducer. The image, then, is precisely not one of the real, but one of the desired imaginary object.

It is this image of the body which causes the disturbance in the picture, since it is improper: the artist not only looks through the image he creates of the unsuspecting maid, whose eyes in the image on the canvas look in the direction of the 'real' subject, the person who has paid for her self-image to be brought into representation, he also paints his object of desire without her knowing it. He is not merely *looking* at her, as if through a crack in the social space of portrait painting, he is *gazing* upon her with the intent of capturing her likeness, of representing her proper image. Indeed, he proper's her likeness, makes it his own, without due regard to her own wishes. We are watching then a conversation, and are faced with a conversation piece about conversation pieces. The conversation being held, however, is far from polite, it is, precisely, criminal.<sup>2</sup>

The picture itself is balanced across the dividing vertical line which demarcates the distance between representation and represented: two women sit below

<sup>2</sup> Criminal conversation was the term used throughout the eighteenth-century for adultery. Hundreds of cases of 'crim. con.', as it was referred to, went before the courts, and were publicized in extremely popular broadsheets. The interest in these cases was more often than not produced by a curiosity in the noble and aristocratic members of society, whose idiosyncrasy was often exposed in the hearings. The use of the term, however, radically alters the connotation of 'polite converse' in a very large number of contexts, from children's conduct books, to Austen's novels.

a canvas on the left side of the picture, whereas the artist occupies the right side, his easel pointing towards the enigma of representation, the blackened space on the wall above him. Here we find a completely illegible space, a picture presumably lies within the frame, but almost too conveniently it has been neglected, the space marks a vacancy, the illegibility of the represented. Far from a balanced economy, then, we have in fact an unaccountable space, pointed out quite clearly by the line of the artist's easel, a framed disturbance within the image which would seem to resist all attempts to read it.

While the body of the maid may be represented larger than life on the artist's canvas, her physical space, the space of the body necessarily becomes flattened, placed within the two-dimensionality of the image. It is this flattening that is being played upon by the positioning of the bodies in different planes, so that the sitter, as we have already remarked, is unable to see her maid behind her. Again, the arrangement of the bodies is designed to highlight this planar organisation so that the sitter occupies the same oblique plane as the image being made, with parallel planes being occupied by the maid and the picture on the wall. The artist appears to occupy both the parallel plane of the image, and the intersecting plane of the back wall containing the busts and the blank picture. The intersection of these two planes defines the crux of the image, as it were, since the apex points to the maid, the unaware object of desire and the illicit subject of representation.

It may well be objected that rather a great deal is being made out of not very much: that this low-level image has nothing to distinguish it from hundreds like it, and that the moral I have presumed to be illustrated by it is less an ethical instruction than a piece of witty tomfoolery. However, a surrounding context was provided for this image in the form of a moral tale which I have until now quite deliberately neglected to mention. This tale makes clear a number of the points above, although it does not read the image in anything like as much detail. The tale is the twenty-seventh of the collection and is entitled 'The Judicious Choice'. It begins in the following way:

They were seated: the painter took his pallet: Miss *Pride* assumed the air which she thought most engaging, and *Molly*, at the request of Sir *Thomas*, read aloud.

The attitude of which the lady made choice prevented her from perceiving how the eyes of the painter were directed.

After some time Miss *Pride* expressed a wish that *Molly* should judge of the likeness: — *Molly* looked at the picture, blushed exceedingly, and spoke not a word.

'You say nothing: is it a bad likeness?'

'Much too favourable?'

'I would not have too much flattery,' said Miss, hastening to view the performance: but what was her surprise at the sight of a beautiful sketch of *Molly*, sitting with a careless air, and a book in her hand! — as soon as she could speak her haughtiness burst forth.

'Sir! I thought that I had informed you plainly of our situation: but you may amuse yourself at your own expense: for I believe *your Beauty* cannot find thirty guineas to reward your

trouble: nor would she have had the presumption to think of sitting to a painter; unless, indeed, I had been taken as *Calypso*, and she as one of my attendants, agreeable to my first plan.'

'Madam! you will pardon me; we painters claim a privilege of pursuing the bent of our own genius; the idea which caught me as I entered the room was so impressed that I could not have done you justice; and for my payment, the pleasure of contemplating an agreeable face is reward sufficient' — this he said, bowing gracefully to *Molly*.

The poor girl was but the more embarrassed by all his civilities, whilst they exasperated miss to such a degree of fury, as provoked Sir *Thomas* to intimate, that the discomposure of her countenance was but ill suited to the occasion of sitting to a painter; but he should hope for a more favourable opportunity of obeying her commands, as well as finishing the charming portrait which he had begun.<sup>3</sup>

The artist, Sir *Thomas*, goes on to marry the servant, *Molly*, who becomes Lady *Carmine*, while Miss *Pride* becomes destitute on receiving nothing from her father's estate when he dies. At this point the moral comes to a conclusion:

Lady *Carmine* contrived to afford her former superior a decent maintenance without allowing her to know from whom she received it. In a few months the heart of this haughty lady burst with disappointment, pride, envy, and a train of tormenting wicked passions; whilst her former dependant lived happily, and was a pattern of modesty, humility, and every amiable quality.

Beware of the beginnings of evil passions! [103]

<sup>3</sup> *The Female Guardian*, no. XXVII, (London, 1784), pp. 100–2.



## 10 Of the Transport of the Reader: the Reading Subject

True eloquence does not wait for cool *approbation*. Like irresistible beauty, it transports, it *raishes*, it *commands the admiration* of all, who are within its reach. If it allows time to *criticize*, it is not *genuine*. It ought to *hurry* us out of ourselves, to *enlarge and swallow* up our whole attention: to *drive* everything out of our *minds*, besides the *subject* it would hold forth, and the *point* it wants to *carry*. The hearer finds himself as *unable* to resist it, as to blow out a conflagration with the breath of his *mouth*, or to *stop* the stream of a river with his *hand*. His *passions* are no longer his *own*. The *orator* has taken *possession* of them; and with superior power, *works* them to whatever he *pleases*.

Sheridan, *A rhetorical grammar*.

### THEORIZING THE ACTIVITY: DEFINING THE PROPER PLACE

The second part of this study has steadily examined how 'theory' sets out to legislate and control a practice, how it produces the excess which it cannot legislate, and removes from the centre to the boundary its limit, limiting case. In this last example, the scene of reading, the implications of this failure take on special significance as the theory attempts to legislate what I want to describe as an imaginary practice, a 'real' reading scene which is represented by and in the theory as changing with alarming rapidity. The outer edge of this argument will claim that these changes in the practice of reading, most especially in regard to the kinds of people engaged in the activity, were to overtake any possible legislative theory so that practice itself could be described as the 'excess' produced by theory. This turn, which I shall discuss in terms of the resistances inherent to the theory, produces the space within which a further leakage became manifest, a further excessive production which situates our discussion, at last, with respect to a gendered account of the subject. In the interests of economy we may call this further excess of theory's practice the feminized subject.

The obsession with the voice demonstrated by Sheridan's *A rhetorical grammar* with which we began, is based in very obvious political and ideological practices: not only is the right to speech a fundamental index to a particular political formation, the sound of the voice also, necessarily, signifies a number of

important social characteristics and ideological affiliations. We have already noted the importance of this network for writers on oratory: the same importance is attached to the voice by reading theorists, but, as I hope to demonstrate, the voice performs a slightly different role in the reading activity which can best be understood by summoning up the counter-force always present to the reading scene, the text.

I shall argue that a fear of the text counterbalances the eighteenth-century obsession with the voice: where the voice indicates one's real or assumed social standing, it functions as a marker for social, sexual and political – representational – power: the text represents that which must be mastered, which must be brought to the rule of the voice. Not only must the author make his views and opinions as clear as possible – mastery of the text in that sense – he must also avoid the situation in which the text produces meanings he does not intend. A large number of eighteenth-century texts are concerned with this dual obsession and fear from the common standpoint of the reading activity, of what is read, how, where, and by whom, to which I shall refer throughout this chapter under the general term of 'reading theory'. It should be pointed out that such enquiries did not always claim for themselves the status of 'theory', nor indeed could all the works discussed below be said to be primarily concerned with reading theory *per se*. As will become clear, however, they share a theoretical commitment to the practice which is articulated around the fear of the text and its corresponding obsession with the voice.

An initial survey of the field would identify numerous works on the practice of reading from their titles alone: Rice's *An Introduction to the art of reading*, or, Sheridan's *Lectures on the Art of Reading* are obvious candidates for investigation. However, many more announce their interests in less obvious ways, in works supposedly devoted to elocution or rhetoric. This is far from coincidental, since, as we have already seen, eighteenth-century reading theory begins with the voice: it is a legislative discourse that is highly motivated in regard to the giving of a voice to the text. This is to say, it is deeply implicated in the restriction and delimitation of those voices which have access to the text, that make the text speak, and which speak in the name of the text. On account of this it necessarily legislates the intervention made by the practice of reading within the network of eighteenth-century social and political discourses that surround the activity. This is well illustrated by Sheridan's comments upon the deplorable state of reading:

In short, that good public reading, or speaking, is one of the rarest qualities to be found, in a country, where reading and speaking in public, are more generally used, than in any other in the world; where the doing them well is a matter of the utmost importance to the state, and to society; and where promotion, or honour to individuals, is sure to attend even a moderate share of merit in those points, is a truth which cannot be denied.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (London, 1762), p. 1.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the various practices of reading, the uses to which they may be put along with the ends they may possibly serve are carefully policed. These ends and means are all articulated around the various relationships that pertain between the reader and the text, between one reader and another, and between one text and another. Thus, as reading theory responds to the increase in the number of readers and the expansion of the number of texts, it must of necessity delimit the practice of reading: it attempts to restrict the number of voices that are able to bring the text to life. Its obsession with the voice is, therefore, in part explained by its fear of the text. In this respect the following chapter is crucial for our continuing examination of the change from a voice-centred discursivity to one centred on and in the text.

The argument following is based on two primary observations: the first is that accounts of the reading activity continually draw on those texts which we most commonly call works of aesthetics – the analysis and description of the sublime. Not only do they use the figures and analyses of the discourse on the sublime, they turn to the heightened experience described and codified by that discursive analytic as an enabling gesture for their own descriptions and analyses. This can be seen from the opening citation in which Sheridan summons up the 'transport' and 'ravishment' so clearly borrowed from the discourse on the sublime in order to give weight, a certain critical mass, to his description of the sensations associated with oratorical performance. It is this 'transport' which becomes the repetitive trope in descriptions of reading, and which links oratory and the reading activity.<sup>2</sup> This brings us to the second observation which concerns the insistence made by reading theory that a text be read aloud. This leads to an enormous investment in the activity as a public social form, and a corresponding strenuous resistance to its deformation into a private activity. Consequently we may note from the start that if to read a text is to give it a voice, to make it heard out loud, and if that activity is carefully determined by a set of rules – the codes of polite social intercourse – which control the transmutation of the dead text into the living body of the speaker, then reading theory is inextricably caught within the knot of those discourses which surround and articulate the body: society, subjectivity and sexuality.

It is because a theory of reading constantly draws upon and is inserted within this knot of discourses that we may feel a pressure towards examining it in terms of its own theorization of that knot – as if it threatened to become a 'meta-

<sup>2</sup> The 'transport' of the reading act is most commonly used in the sense of strong and vivid feeling; however, the modern use of the term, meaning form of transportation is very often implied as well. Thus Thomas Percival is able to use the term primarily in this modern sense in his comment on Homer: 'Homer, whose knowledge of the magnitude and distances of the heavenly bodies, must have been very confined, never displays a more glowing imagination, than when he introduces them to our notice. And no one can view this animated picture of a moonlight and starry night, without feeling himself transported to the scene which, it exhibits.' Percival, *Moral and Literary Dissertations*, 2nd edn (London, 1789), p. 226.

theory' of the discourses of the body. We should resist this pressure, at least for the time being, while noticing that this tendency to 'theorize' its own contextualizing discourses, certainly a distinguishing feature of all theoretical discourse, is continually placed in tension with its primary purpose, that of delimiting an area of practice which it sets out to legislate. Thus, a good case could be made for claiming that 'reading theory' is really a misnomer, since these texts strenuously attempt to remain 'merely' descriptions of the activity. It is this resistance to the status of theory which interests me, since, as shall become clear, this disavowal of theoretical status is one of the most powerful legislative moves made by 'reading theory' upon the practice. In this sense the resistance to theory can be understood as a resistance to itself, a discussion of which will occupy the last pages of this chapter.<sup>3</sup>

If we take as our starting point the two observations above it is clear that our description of reading will constantly refer to the larger issues articulated by the knot of discourses surrounding the body. Thus, it will be apparent that at times reading theory is more involved in the legislation of social space, for example, than the voicing out loud of a text, although the two are very much connected, whereas at others the differences in social behaviour allowed to men and women can be seen as the direct result of the rules governing the reading aloud of texts. In other words 'reading theory' never remains merely a description of the rules for reading, rather, it is necessarily implicated within those larger social, sexual and ideological discourses which determine the space of the subject.

In the chapters on speaking and viewing we attempted to read theoretical discourse as if it were discrete in order to examine the use of this strategy as an explanatory and analytical tool. Here, in the following argument, the opposite perspective will be taken in which the discursive network will be the focus of our attention in order to see through it to the discrete discourse of reading theory. Because of this it will constantly be found difficult to read the set of texts I refer to as 'reading theory' as if they *only* legislated the practice of reading. It will, therefore, be very evident throughout the discussion that in describing a particular facet of the reading activity and its corresponding rules or theory, one is always also describing a particular set of assumptions and practices surrounding the subject. This we should note is a correlative of our attempts to examine the discourse of the sublime and which have led to this particular perspective of the subject. We can also note that 'reading theory' may be described from the other side, as it were, as if its obverse face articulated the knot of discourses surrounding the body. For all these reasons and in the light of the above

<sup>3</sup> The use of the term 'resistance' most especially when it is joined to 'theory' cannot go unremarked since de Man's essay entitled 'The Resistance to Theory' would seem to claim rights over the phrase. At least its *legacy* is perhaps to have claimed those rights. While I cannot but write after, in the light of, de Man's powerful exposition I also hope to extend the use of the idea to this historical account of eighteenth-century theory.

qualifications, the following discussion is disfigured by this rather complex knot: in describing the reader's voice, for example, the question over whose voice is heard aloud, the reader's or the author's as imitated by the reader, has clear ramifications within the eighteenth-century conceptualization of the subject. Not only this, however, since the tone of the voice, the gestures used, and the precise place of the reading scene all bear importantly upon those implicit and explicit codes of behaviour which determine social intercourse. Furthermore, the problem over the reader's voice, as to whether it be male or female, is necessarily involved in the network of discourses which defined and produced, at the very least, public attitudes and conceptions of sexuality and gender differentiation. It is clear from all this that the entire knot of discourses concerned with the subject and society is constantly activated by 'reading theory'.

The organization of society, for example, is reflected in eighteenth-century reading practice in a dramatic and unignorable way: to read is for the most part to indulge in leisure: it is to display wealth and education and to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Above all else it is to claim for oneself a certain social standing, a certain right to a place, a certain situation: it is not necessarily to demonstrate one's ability to read. This last point should be stressed, if only because of its immediate absurdity. Our information regarding the practice of eighteenth-century readers is based in large part on the contemporary representations of people reading, but those representations may well derive more of their force and meaning from their articulation within the network of social values attaching to that activity, than from a more neutral registration of the fact that the individual portrayed was able to read. In other words, a representation of someone reading may be an index to the character's presumed or assumed social status; it is to be read as a sign within the discourses of contemporary eighteenth-century society in the first instance, and may only be of secondary significance in relation to an accurate portrayal of reading skills.

Statistics for literacy are notoriously hard to come by,<sup>5</sup> and this, compounded by the problems in setting up useful criteria for ascertaining literacy rates leads to

<sup>4</sup> Many works on education make distinctions between different kinds of texts and the places suitable for their consumption. Some texts, for example, should only be read in the country, or taken as 'summer reading'. In this way the indiscriminate consumption of 'trash' novels at fashionable country resorts was distinguished from the more serious 'improving' reading prescribed for 'normal' daily city life. John Burton, for example, comments about novels: 'Reading is an amusement, for which the Country is particularly favourable.' *Lectures on female education and manners*, 2 vols (London, 1793), I, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> See Lawrence Stone, 'Literacy and Education in England, 1640-1900', *Past and Present*, no. 42 (1969), pp. 69-139 for a discussion of the problems involved.

a very imprecise picture of reading skills and habits during the century.<sup>6</sup> Even more difficult to judge with any certitude, however, are those contemporary accounts of reading which survive, for, just as it was hardly likely for someone to write down what they actually *did* while reading, it was equally unlikely that anyone who could not read would write down this fact. Furthermore, a representation of someone reading gives us confusing information about the level of reading skills generally prevalent: one might have pretended to read then, just as now.<sup>7</sup>

If we think of the number of novels in which characters are portrayed reading we can see this in operation, although from a slightly different perspective. The novel during the period of its so called 'rise' was in direct competition with other discursive forms, and, perhaps more pointedly, with other forms of text: it had, therefore, manifest reasons for self-advertisement: the people portrayed were not reading any old thing, they were reading novels.<sup>8</sup>

We must note, then, the revision that takes place during the century to the social significance of the reading activity. In the first instance it is an indication of money: the ability to purchase reading matter, the possession of the leisure time in which to read, and the ownership of the social space in which to be seen engaged in the reading activity. It may also signify the desire for self-

<sup>6</sup> By far the most useful work that I have come across is that by Paul Kaufman, *Libraries and their users* (London, 1969), in which various statistics for library borrowings are given. He also, very pointedly, remarks in the essay 'In Defense of Fair Readers' on the number of women who belonged to the Bath Municipal library - less than 30 per cent - and on the borrowing habits of its members. His conclusions counter very strongly the general assumption that women made up the bulk of novel readers, a point that I take up in the second part of this chapter. However, even these statistics are of limited value, since membership of a public library would have been self-selecting upon social grounds: the really useful statistics would be those pertaining to circulating library borrowings; unfortunately none has, as yet, come to light.

<sup>7</sup> I mean to refer to the quite common behaviour of illiterate people who pretend to read newspapers and so forth in public spaces. The reasons for this in our own time are obviously multiple, but they are based upon a certain value attached to the skills of literacy; what we do not know is the extent to which this was generally dispersed in eighteenth-century England.

<sup>8</sup> Of course the availability of texts changed from one part of the country to another, so even the depiction of people reading novels may have a very restricted significance - precisely a meaning for those people able to buy or borrow a novel. Thomas Holcroft, for example, claimed that after reading the Bible and two chap books he read nothing else for six years on account of the scarcity of books. See *Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft, written by himself*, ed. William Hazlitt, 3 vols (London, 1816), I, pp. 134-5. For a good discussion of the competing forms of discourse surrounding the rise of the novel see Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions* (New York, 1983).

improvement, the prime example of which must be the opening of *Pamela*.<sup>9</sup> It gradually becomes, however, a more complex sign, dependent upon the type of material read and location of the activity. One of its new meanings, most notably in relation to 'trash', is to indicate indulgence, illicit behaviour and idleness as men and women from lower social classes join the ranks of the literate.

This change in the social significance of the reading activity occurs alongside the other changes that affect both readers and reading: the simple increase in the numbers of books produced, the production of cheap editions towards the end of the century, and the entry of a new class of readers, women. This last phenomenon radically alters the reading scene, as we can see most clearly in relation to the material being read. However, before we accept the commonplace of the history of the reading public which claims unproblematically that women increasingly engaged in the consumption of printed material, we should dwell a moment on the assumptions and implications behind it. It is often held that as women found themselves relieved of the burden of many of the mental tasks necessary for the smooth running of the household they experienced a vast increase in their leisure time. In response to this, it is often, but perhaps tacitly, assumed that a new category of reading material suddenly appeared, the novel, in order to supply the ever-increasing demand on the part of women readers.<sup>10</sup> These assumptions are, of course, based in fact, but not very much on facts: we do not know how many women actually entered into the book-consuming public, nor do we know if it was exclusively women who 'demanded' novels. This is discussed at some length in the second part of this chapter.

Whatever the merits or demerits of such a sketch, the important thing to note is the perceived relationship of the type of reading matter to the gender of the reader. To read, as shall become more apparent, is to make a series of claims for oneself within the contemporary network of social and sexual codes of behaviour. We can see this in a simple sense in relation to the classification of the reading material, which uses gender specification as one of its primary distinguishing features. If reading matter is classified according to gender difference, say poetry for men and novels for women, then the activity itself is of necessity also constructed upon similar gender differentiation. On account of this, reading, in terms of both its controlling theory and as an activity, must, at some level, represent an intervention and interpolation within the discursive thresholds which surround, even if they do not yet define, sexuality.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'improvement' is, of course, loaded: Johnson, for example, was more concerned with women 'improving' their conversational skill by learning to read, than anything else. See *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev., L.F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), III, p. 333.

<sup>10</sup> For a different approach from this standard version of the rise of the novel see Davis, *Factual Fictions*. A number of recent books have examined this conventional description in relation to the generic category of the novel. See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel* (Baltimore, 1987), Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (London, 1987) and Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford, 1986).

One form of the story about this gendered scene goes in the following way: women readers, when indulging their presumed insatiable desire for novels, practised an erotics of reading that was markedly distinct from the production of sexual identity engaged in by men when publicly reading aloud to an audience. Consequently, as the erotics of the reading activity became gradually internalized, removed from the public domain to the private, the social relations and gender stereotyping which constituted the 'real' of sociality must have also undergone revision: not only did the existing cartography of sexual differentiation become redrawn, the basis upon which sexual identity was determined also changed. This is where the history of the novel and its audience complicates things, for such revisions or interruptions within the foundations of the socio-sexual can be seen most forcefully in relation to the novel, a discursive form that was certainly seen by most eighteenth-century writers as a feminine form – it is of course a commonplace that it increasingly became the territory of women writers during the later half of the eighteenth-century and the early nineteenth – but which, as I shall argue, was defined according to gender specificity primarily in order to legislate the space of social and sexual representation. This point will be made at some length later, but it can be introduced here most economically by noting that while it was almost obsessively claimed that *women* read 'trifling novels' all the evidence amassed by Paul Kaufman suggests precisely the opposite, that men made up the bulk of novel readers. My point is that something greater was at stake in claiming gender specificity for particular kinds of texts, and that such classifications were certainly not transparent descriptions of actual states of affairs.<sup>11</sup>

This change in social and sexual identities is not in any simple way articulated around the gender of the author: the reading of novels, for example, was recognized by reading theory as a different activity from other kinds of texts, and this recognition predates the more often cited truism that market forces and 'taste' by and large determined the massive consumption of novels by women. Furthermore, as novels came to represent a feminine writerly activity, the theoretical taxonomy of texts based upon gender specification became even more prevalent.<sup>12</sup> My argument throughout is that the activity of reading is

<sup>11</sup> It should also be pointed out that by 'novels' here one is referring to those books classed as such by eighteenth-century librarians. The mass of Minerva Press 'novels', for example, would probably not even have found shelf space in those libraries whose records survive. However, even if one grants that women were the main customers of the circulating libraries it is still difficult to make any hard conclusions, since these women may not have been only borrowing books for themselves, but also, on the contrary, 'fronting' for their husband or male acquaintances.

<sup>12</sup> One interesting example of the connection between novel writing and sexuality is given in Boswell's *London Journal*. Boswell's account of his first few months in London are obsessively concerned with his pursuit of Louisa Lewis. On Sunday 2 January 1763 he managed at last to take her to bed. Unfortunately the couple were disturbed by the landlady before Boswell had time to consummate the act. After returning to respectability and the dining room, where they 'fell into each other's arms, sighing and pining', a short conversation follows in which Boswell 'told her she might make a novel'. *Boswell's London Journal 1762–1763* (London, 1950), p. 117.

inextricably interwoven within the theory so that the changing relationship between reading practice and its authenticating other should be seen as prefigurative of changes to the socio-sexual which surround the discourses on reading and its practice 'in the real'.

I shall argue that the end result of a theory of reading that is based upon a fear of the text and a corresponding valuation of the voice is a textual commodification which both reflects and determines the social and political. As Sheridan realised, if the project to teach people how to read is taken seriously it can only eventually destroy the fabric of polite society. Indeed, his own analysis of the deplorable state of reading is based in a quite commonplace topos which links unhealthy reading habits with a continuing moral, social and political degeneration of the state of England. Sheridan may have wanted to believe that by making reading healthy once again the country would automatically return to its former health. However, he must also have realized that by changing the social construction of the reading public he would also change society at large.<sup>13</sup>

All of the texts in the following discussion are engaged within the politics of holding one version of the reading contract over another, as strenuously arguing for the subordination of the reader to the text, for example, over the reader's mastery of the text. The discussion has been split into two main sections, the first describing the attempt to construct a theory of reading during the eighteenth century, whereas the second examines the limits of that theory when it is faced with the practice.

#### The Reader's Voice

Isaac Watt's book *The Art of Reading and Writing English* (1721) is typical of many designed for the use of schoolchildren, presuming, as it does, that the children who fall under its influence are all male, something which Enfield's *Speaker*, published at the end of the century, does not, and that the method for teaching reading is precisely the same as for writing, namely, by rote.<sup>14</sup> This connection

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sheridan, *Lectures on Elocution*, p. 1. Such a change in the social was hardly likely to happen overnight, however. The enormous increase in the number of people who read generated by Paine's *Rights of Man* was continually countered by reactionary propaganda discouraging the reading habit. See *Liberty and Property preserved against Republicans and Levelers: A Collection of Tracts* (London, 1793), no. 4, p. 8. For information on the popularity of Paine's *Rights of Man* see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957), p. 70, and for a contemporary account J.T. Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature*, 2nd edn. (London, 1797), p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> The text which became most heavily used for teaching literacy skills was Thomas Dyche's *Guide to the English Tongue* which had circulated in 275 000 copies by 1748 and reached its 59th edition in 1778. These figures are given by Thomas R. Preston, 'Biblical Criticism, literature, and the eighteenth century reader', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London, 1982), p. 99.

between reading, writing and the correct pronunciation of words is firmly embedded in reading theory, even when that connection is not explicitly made. William Cockin, for example, in his *The Art of Deliv'ring Written Language; or, an Essay on Reading* (1775) attempts to break apart the connection between speaking and writing; between the voice and the text, while John Rice signals his awareness of the implied assumptions made by a theory of reading that was not dependent upon an individual's ability to express him or herself.<sup>15</sup> In Watt's account the reader simply mimics the thoughts of someone else, whereas Rice advises that children first learn how to write in order to express their own thoughts: the distinction being made here, between the reading subject, the person who reads, and the subject being read, the person who writes, is crucial for reading theorists since it articulates the boundary between the subject and the text in both the process of writing and of reading. Many theorists, like Sheridan, deplored the situation in which a person speaking his own thoughts from his own text tended to put on a 'reading voice' – i.e. one distinguished from his normal speaking voice – thereby signalling that he was reading, and in so doing denying the possibility of his sounding like himself.<sup>16</sup>

Watt states that reading is simply correct speech; in reading with 'propriety' one voices out loud the words on the page in a dignified, elegant and correct fashion. The tone of voice used is extremely important since it is an index to the user's social status. In this sense reading with propriety, as Enfield was fully aware, is to read with the intonation of owning property, or as Sheridan forcefully claims, correct and proper speech is an imitation of court English.<sup>17</sup> For Watt the reader merely supplies the voice which the text lacks, and that is all. He does recognize, however, that the public domain of reading necessarily involves a certain display of the voice of the reader, and this presents a problem concerning the ownership of the voice: is it the speaker's, or is the speaker simply bringing into speech the absent voice of the author? This problem leads to a potential confusion in which the audience may be seduced into listening to the reader's voice and imputing the ideas and sentiments contained in the text to the reader. Furthermore, the performance of different readers will be distinct; one may perform better than another, and this leads to the dangerous possibility of the audience appreciating more the lustre of the reader's voice than the sentiments or expressions in the text. Consequently, the performance itself may take on greater importance than the text being read, which is to recognize

<sup>15</sup> See William Cockin, *The Art of Deliv'ring Written Language; or, an Essay on Reading* (London, 1775), p. 127, and John Rice, *An Introduction to the art of reading*, (London, 1765), p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> See Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London, 1782), I, pp. 107–8.  
<sup>17</sup> Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, p. 30.

already a certain site of contestation. In addition to this, a truly uplifting text should not only be well read, but also contain fine sentiments.

From the above we can see that reading, as a social activity, is extremely well placed to demonstrate one's aspirations regarding social standing. In part, it is on account of this that the struggle between the voice and the text arises. The reading scene is invested with a great deal of significance, demonstrating the reader's powers of performance, powers that are not only directed at swaying his or her audience – the traditional powers of oratory – but also at the text itself, since the competent reader must 'master' the text in order to read it.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the reading scene is suffused with anxiety over the object of appropriation: if one can be said to have 'mastered' a text one has appropriated it to one's voice; if on the other hand a poor performance takes place the text can be said to have mastered the reader. Thomas Sheridan is terrified of losing this struggle, as can be seen from the opening citation. In his *A rhetorical grammar* he claims as strongly that reading 'is nothing but speaking what one sees in a book, as if he were expressing his own sentiments, as they rise in his mind';<sup>19</sup> the reader should 'personate the author', making his person identical to that of the author:

The very best . . . is, that he should become an accomplished actor – possessing the *plastic* power of putting himself, in imagination, so completely into the situation of him who he personates, and of adopting, for the moment, so perfectly, all the sentiments and views of that character, as to express himself exactly as such a person would have done, in the supposed situation.<sup>20</sup>

This involves more than simply readers and texts: at its base it is concerned with the place of the subject, how it is constructed and who or what can be said to own it. When the question being addressed is: should one become the person of the author, thereby relinquishing one's own personality, against the possible personation of the author, appropriating the person of the author to oneself, the stakes that are being played for are very high indeed.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> John Walker puts it in the following way: 'The art of reading with justness, energy and ease, consists chiefly in adopting as much as possible, the words of an author for our own, and pronouncing them as if they were conceived expressly for the present purpose: from which position it will necessarily follow, that those readers are the best, who approach the nearest to the best extemporary speakers.' John Walker, *Hints for improvement in the art of reading* (London, 1783), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Sheridan, *A Rhetorical Grammar*, p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, rpt (Carbondale, 1963) p. 380.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. John Mason, *An Essay on elocution and pronunciation* (London, 1748), p. 28. 'If you would acquire a just Pronunciation in Reading you must not only take in the full Sense, but enter into the Spirit of your Author'. This trope is very common, in which the reader is not only supposed to enter into the spirit of the *meaning*, but, seemingly, into the absent spirit of the author himself. Such 'spiritualism' may appear an excessive reading, but the articulation of the spirit/body distinction is more than evident.

The situation is made even more complex when we consider the different uses to which the reading of a text may be put. One of the major drifts in its contextual use is from a sacred to a secular domestic framework,<sup>22</sup> and the ensuing changes in the manner and matter of the audience's participation, from passive recipients of words of wisdom and instruction, to active agents in a social entertainment and display of identity, produce a new set of contextual markers for understanding the reading activity. One marker is undoubtedly the definition of sexual roles as the reading of texts aloud shifts from a religious scene of instruction to a highly charged scene of seduction.<sup>23</sup>

This is very evident in the role of the speaker – Enfield's chrestomathy cannot be said to have been named by chance – who assumes the position of the powerful orator. We have already seen in chapter 6 how the possibilities for the display of sexuality in this situation are far from ignored: the reader/speaker aims to keep his audience hanging on every word, taunting and teasing according to a set of rules which legislate gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice: precisely the languages of the body.<sup>24</sup> That this scene was so highly charged can also be inferred from conduct books which set out to legislate the polite behaviour of children. In these texts the scene of reading represents something from which children were excluded, both in the aspect of their own reading of texts in company, and of their reactions to others reading. This exclusion can be noted from the following strictures:

Study your Exercise when alone; and never read or look upon a Book in Company.

If a letter should be sent to you, and requires to be read while you are in Company, bow, and say, Gentlemen, or Ladies, I beg your Pardon a few Moments, then read it.

Never look into Papers which lie about, nor fix your Eyes upon another who is reading.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Of interest in this regard is the spread of Methodism, a doctrine founded on the notion of the 'reading Christian'. 'The role of books, both for instruction and entertainment was vital for Wesley, who instructed chapels to display his recommended books and to sell them.

<sup>23</sup> This is described clearly in *Pictures of Life: or, a Record of Manners physical and moral, at the close of the eighteenth century*, 2 vols (London, 1790), Picture 24: 'Observe then this delighted supper party, where two lovers, each with a favourite fair-one by his side, freed from the peering observation of attendants, enjoy without restraint the joys of love and wine. The muse of one, inspired by champagne, risks a warm and very expressive declaration of his love in the poetry of a song, which he appears anxious to suppress after it has once been read. – What significant glances! – what acuteness in developing its meaning, beam from the eyes of the fair reader!' II, p. 171.

<sup>24</sup> See notably Sheridan's comments: 'rarely, very rarely seen among us, where the speaker blends the two languages properly, the fancy, the passions, the understanding are all pleasingly agitated, each individual receives an additional delight, from the sum communicated to the whole auditory reflected from eye to eye, during a charmed attention to the orator, poured out from breast to breast, when his silence permits them to give way to the fullness of their hearts.' *The Art of Reading*, I, p. 186.

Children, of course, should be seen and not look: they should refrain from making their presence felt, most especially in a scene of reading in which the exchange of glances and gestural languages communicate to such an extent.

The adult, however, should strive to command his or her voice, and to control body gesture for his or her own ends. In relation to this Sheridan marks for us the end of the eighteenth-century obsession with the voice by outlining in terrifying detail the implications of raising his master's voice to the highest level of amplification. We have already commented upon his infatuation with or bewitchment by his own voice: he is consumed by his own power to such an extent that it runs away with *himself*. This abduction of person – the appropriation of the self by the voice – can be seen as a form of auto-eroticism.<sup>25</sup> In Sheridan's case his fascination with the power of the voice stems from his analysis of the sexuality involved in the reading scene, a sexuality which may in fact be produced by that scene as the power of the voice is reflected from the audience back to the reader – precisely a reflection of the seductive male power which carries, transports the audience away. Once again we are in the domain of the highly reflective surfaces of the public space, surfaces which produce as much as they reproduce identity. In this scene the skillful reader/orator obtains his satisfaction from his powerful manipulation of the audience, a satisfaction, it should be stressed, that is only just short of being explicitly described in terms of seduction. In short, the reader comes on to his audience as strongly as possible while remaining within the codes of polite conduct.

As we have seen, that power may also become excessive, and may result in a self-awareness that is, effectively, a self-obsession. The power of the orator, his expression of masculinity, becomes turned in and on itself, resulting in the sexuality of auto-eroticism that so clearly disturbs Sheridan's text, but to which it is irrevocably drawn. While such a male version of the scene of seduction is perhaps more prevalent among texts on the practice of reading, a female equivalent

<sup>25</sup> *The polite academy, or School of behaviour for young gentlemen and ladies*, (London, 1762), p. 24; also reprinted in John Drummond, *A grammatical introduction to the modern pronunciation and spelling of the English tongue* (Edinburgh, 1767), pp. 91–144.

<sup>26</sup> This is not necessarily the case for women readers, who perform in a different space, and with different controlling and contextualizing criteria. The man may produce or display his person, his male identity, but the woman is more likely merely to 'entertain' both her audience and herself, leaving these problematic areas of identity unchanged. This is commented upon in *The female miscellany*: 'But many Persons are defective and erroneous in their manner of Reading. And that you may not be of that number, let one put you in mind, that if you observe the Points or Stops when you read, which is like keeping time in Music, at the same time varying the tone of your Voice, the cast of your Eye, and the gesture of your Body, according to the Subject you are reading upon; in short, if you read as you speak when you are properly affected, you will do it in such manner as will be entertaining to yourself, and those that hear you.' *The female miscellany*, in two parts (Salop, 1770), pp. 5–6.

also existed in which the woman attempted to 'impress' the minds of her hearers, rather less with the substance of her text, one imagines, than with her own merits:

The truth is, you may judge from the air, manner, and gesture of a good reader, or at most, from the inarticulate sound of her voice, though you should not be near enough to comprehend the sense, what is the general subject of the book. But with a bad reader, you must hear and understand the full sense and meaning of every word and expression, before you can know what she is about . . . Besides, there is another material difference between a good and bad reader, which is this, that the former conveys the author's meaning fully and distinctly to her hearers, and makes a deep and lasting impression upon their minds; whereas the latter makes little or no impression at all; or, if she does, it is rather owing to the merit of the book, than to her insipid manner of reading it.<sup>27</sup>

The change from a sacred to a secular context for reading aloud also affects the relative roles of the author and reader. In the sacred situation the authority of the text is rarely, if ever, questioned. The eighteenth-century secular version of this text reverence is the elevation of the author to the sole ownership of the text's meaning. John Rice, for example, insists that the reader should first understand a text before he sets about reading it, thereby assuring that he convey the 'whole meaning of the author' to his listener:

. . . the Art of Reading consists in conveying to the Hearer the whole Meaning of the Writer. To this End, it is evidently necessary that the Reader should himself understand what he reads, before he can possibly repeat it intelligibly to others. This is the first and indisputable Qualification of a Reader; without which, the most articulate Pronunciation, with all the Artifices of Tone, Look or Gesture, will avail nothing, or only serve to mislead the Hearer: the Orator, Actor and Reader, being all understood to say, what they appear to mean, rather than what they literally utter.<sup>28</sup>

Rice is arguing against pronunciation *per se*, against the mere addition of the lustre of the voice to the dead letter of the text. His notion of the play of subjectivity in the reading activity is close to that of Enfield, in which two possible subjects are engaged, the author and the reader, and in which the model approximating their interchange most accurately is the conversation.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> [Charles Allen], *The polite lady; or, a course of female education, in a series of letters*, 3rd edn. (London, 1775), p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Rice, *An Introduction to the art of reading*, pp. 4–5. See also Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, 2nd edn (London, 1781), p. 117.

<sup>29</sup> This model is not the only one present to the split subject: the division may also take place within the reader who adopts two voices, a 'speaking voice' for conversation, and a 'reading voice' for reading, thereby signaling the presence of two distinct personae. This is warned against by the authors of *Instructions for right spelling, and plain directions for reading and writing true English*, 3rd edn (Dublin, 1796), p. 3: 'let the Sound of their Voice in Reading be the same, as in speaking, free, easy and natural, lest any should mistake the Reader and Speaker for 2 different Persons, if their Eyes did not shew the contrary.'

But if there are two possible subjects dispersed in the reading activity, then the possibility of confusing one with the other arises, or, even more problematic, the possibility of the listener taking the reader for the author becomes apparent. William Cockerin tackles this problem in his *The Art of Delineating Written Language*:

The matter of all books is either what the author says in his *own* person, or an acknowledged recital of the words of *others*: Hence an author may be esteemed both an *original* speaker and a *repeater*, accordingly as what he writes is of the first or second kind. Now a reader must be supposed either actually to personate the author, or one, whose office is barely to communicate what he has said to an auditor. But in the first of these suppositions he would, in the delivery of what is the author's own, evidently commence *mimic*; which being, as above observed, a character not acknowledged by general nature in this department, ought to be rejected as generally improper.<sup>30</sup>

The reader should not simplistically imitate the author, he should not step outside the bounds of propriety and claim to be someone he is not. Rather, in the speech which animates written language the reader should appropriate the *meanings* of the text, and present his oration in *propria voce*; above all he should sound natural, and as if he were in conversation. This conversational model has a certain logic to it, since the words we speak for ourselves are, in some manner at least, originated by us. Walker explains this:

When we speak our own words, we pronounce our thoughts in a direct manner, as it may be called. The *idea* arises first in the mind, and that elects the word by which to express it; but in reading, the *word* suggests the idea, and produces the correspondent sensibility of tone, in an inverted order. For in speaking, the accompaniments of tone, emphasis, and gesture, are immediately connected with the internal idea or sentiment, and precede the words that express them: and thus are spontaneous and natural productions of the mind: but in reading, the words precede the ideas, and by a retrospection, only, is the mind capable of adapting a suitable expression to them. In short, in one case, feelings are the natural production of the mind, of which words are only signs; in the other, the feelings are produced artificially, and dictated entirely and instantaneously by the words we read: so that those who have the greatest facility of making an author's words their own, are the best readers; or in other words, those readers are the best, who can act the part of the author or speaker most naturally.<sup>31</sup>

This foray into the phenomenology of reading demonstrates the concern aroused by the rules regulating the activity and the drive to clarify its procedures

<sup>30</sup> Cockerin, *The Art of Delineating Written Language*, pp. 6–7. See also George Croft, *A Plan of Education delineated* (Wolverhampton, 1784), p. 18: 'The general Rules of Emphasis must be inculcated from particular instances, and it is often found that a good voice and a good ear will enable a very slow person to read over what is read to him with tolerable accuracy. But unless he enter into the Spirit of the Writer, his reading is but Mimicry; and place any new Composition before him, you will then find how little able he is to apply and to practice the Rules of Speaking.'

<sup>31</sup> Walker, *Hints for improvement*, pp. 2–3.

and protocols. Rice makes the connection between conversation, the immixing of two voices, and proper reading even more forcefully: '... if the Reader could make the Words and Sentiments of the Writer his own, he would deliver a *written lecture* with the same Propriety as he utters his own Discourse; his reading having the same Precision and Energy as his conversation' [7]. The corrupt form of this correct reading is exemplified by the actor who 'enters into the spirit of his character before he hath sufficiently studied the meaning of his author, and thus, may personate such character with great propriety in general while he perverts the sense of particular passages' [8]. The actor may lose his own identity, and that, as we have seen, is the greatest risk of all: the reader, if he approximates the actor, may deceive himself into thinking that he is the author, and, furthermore he may read improperly, giving a sense to the words not intended by the author. It is this attention to the original place of speech that is most important:

As the Art of Reading does not consist, like that of Acting, in really adopting the words and sentiments of the Writer; it is sufficient, that the Reader recite what is written in such a manner, that the Auditors, at the time of Hearing, might conceive it then first spoken by the person reciting; or at least in such a manner as the Person, first speaking it, would naturally have uttered it [8]

Here the reader must dissolve his personality, and in so doing he attempts to become the mouth through which the author speaks, turning his manifest and opaque person – the body present in the reading scene – into a cipher or transparency which can be read by the audience as the complete coincidence of reader and text, or the author's sentiments and the reader's expressions. Because of this the reader must *lose consciousness*, lose his sense of self: he must make a strong and continual effort so to withdraw this mind, not only from studied modulation of voice, but from the consciousness that he is reading, – and so to absorb himself, as it were, not only in the general sentiments, but in each separate expression, as to make it thoroughly his own at the moment of utterance.<sup>32</sup>

Here we have the temporalization of the subject, the intense sense of self one moment which is followed by its annihilation the next. Thus, paradoxically, the reader experiences an overwhelming sense of his own person by 'absorbing himself' to such an extent that his identity is dissolved, swallowed up by the text. This is almost a kind of textualization of the subject, since it is 'read' in the process of reading.

We should recall at this point that the primary location for the reading activity put forward by these theorists is the exterior aural reality of the voice. That voice is seen as the translation of the text, and is legislated by the text itself. However, *reading theory*, as opposed to practice, recognizes the need for a further

<sup>32</sup> Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, p. 383.



legislative text – the text of theory. So it comes about that the discrepancy between the performance of the text, reading in practice, and the legislative text of theory, reading *in* theory, opens up both the terrain to be legislated or brought to law and bears witness to the inefficacy of the law. A theory of reading is necessary because of this discrepancy, while at the same time, it is predicated upon the existence of such a discrepancy. This awkward suspension can also be located in the graphic layout of reading theory to which we now turn.

#### The Textual Face

We have discussed at some length the various configurations of the author, the text, and the reader, but we have not examined the possibilities for cutting up the textual face in different ways in order to reflect these configurations. The graphic organization of a text, which I have termed the textual face, will most obviously change according to the uses to which a book is intended to be put.<sup>35</sup> Once again I shall confine my examples to those texts which fall within the domain of the theory of reading.

James Burgh's *The Art of Speaking* was intended to be used as an instruction manual; most of the book presents a series of extracts from 'literary classics' for reading practice. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about this, the number of similar collections of 'elegant extracts' published during this period is very large.<sup>34</sup> What is rather different, however, is the graphic layout of the text when seen in the light of the overall organization of the book.

We find in Burgh's primer for reading a series of headings corresponding to the 'humours and passions' under which the various extracts are arranged. Thus, in order to feel 'anguish' for example, one need simply turn to the section of the book organized under that head. Here one finds a number of extracts in relatively large print from famous and not so famous texts which are supposed to summon up the feeling of anguish. The extract is accompanied by a series of words running down the margins of the pages which give further indications as

<sup>33</sup> John Rice, for example, comments on the graphic presentation of texts, comparing a newspaper to an epic poem and a tragedy. See *An Introduction to the art of reading*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> A very important function of these primers was to open up the curriculum in order to include works written in the vernacular. Women, of course, were by and large not taught the classical languages, which was something of a disadvantage given that Latin was the language used for teaching during most of the century in mainstream educational institutions – hence their dependence on literature in English. That nearly all the works referred to in this section print selections from English authors is significant then, in terms of the prevailing norms of education. It should also be pointed out that many of these works were written by and for dissenters who had been excluded from the traditional (classical) educational institutions, and had, because of this set up their own 'academies'. Various studies have outlined the contribution of dissenters to educational reform: see above ch. 6, note 21.

to the correct feelings to be experienced. In this fashion the 'humour' or 'passion' is indicated next to that part of the text presumed to be most efficacious in summoning it up.

The immediate result of this, and something which is strikingly apparent to the modern eye, is that the reader's attention is split across the page: the eyes must move from 'text', the extract, to the margin, the indicated 'passion', all the time. There the reader finds commands to feel certain emotions, commands which, it should be pointed out, change with alarming frequency. The 'handbook' nature of the enterprise had also been carefully thought out so that the apprentice reader, once practised in this strange kind of textual fusion, could turn to an index at the back where all manner of possible and impossible emotional responses are listed.<sup>35</sup> Thus, one day feeling a little low, perhaps, in order to rouse his spirits the reader merely turned to 'transport' in the index which located the number of passages in the main body of the book where this is indicated in the margin as being the correct response.

The relationship between the text and the resulting passion is a curious one which seems to short-circuit any possible disagreement on the part of the reader, and to negate the interpretive work which we more commonly associate with the reading activity: the translation from the passion embedded within the text to the emotion felt by the reader is presumed to be complete and exact. In this way the reader could be said to be reading the instruction for the relevant passion rather than the text: it should be pointed out that questions concerning the meaning of the cited text never arise.

The situation is closest to that of being in the presence of a skillful orator, where the listener is moved to various emotions by the power of the orator's voice. However, these passages are also supposed to be used for reading practice, where the novice reader is alone: in this situation a rather different set of contextual markers come into operation, where the voice of the solitary reader may produce a strange form of vocal auto-eroticism in which the reader is stimulated by the power of his own voice.<sup>36</sup>

This self-arousal is graphically represented at the text's face, since in reading this text one does not look within it for its meaning; rather, one reads across its

<sup>35</sup> This kind of 'analytical index' is one of the main textual characteristics of eighteenth-century books. However, in this particular instance the index not only serves as an efficient way of locating topics in the book, it determines where one should look for any particular experience. In the same way Richardson composed indices to *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* which instructed the reader as to the correct moral to learn from particular episodes. In this sense the index is less textual apparatus than the text itself.

<sup>36</sup> See Enfield, *The Speaker*, p. xxiv.

face, from extract to margin. This motion of the eye is precisely mirrored in the 'live' reading scene where one constantly looks from text to audience. In the case of Burgh's book that motion is from text to margin, from the body of the text to its boundary. This shuttling back and forth, across the textual face on the one hand, and from the body of the text to the bodies in the audience on the other, is one of the analogues of the textual fissure analyzed in the section on the reader's voice.

We can see this suturing movement in two ways: the first regards the end result of looking across the face of the text as an harmonious sewing together of the text and the margin, as, in terms of the reading subject, the identification of the author with the reader, whereas the second regards the gaps between text and margin, or reader and audience as the space that allows the subject to become manifest, and within which it resides. In other words the text, on the one hand, or the audience on the other, either functions as a mirror reflecting the self to itself, or as the site for the representation of subjectivity. This may be to claim more for reading theory than it can uphold, but that it constantly draws upon and makes reference to the interrelated problems of subjectivity and sexuality which arise in this schematics of the text will become more and more apparent.

The kind of prescriptive reading activity that is produced by Burgh's book is not always represented graphically in the same fashion,<sup>37</sup> and as the textual face changes so the emphasis from one kind of reading practice to another mutates. In *Sheridan and Henderson's Practical Method of Reading and Reciting English Poetry*, a book intended as a preface to Enfield's *Speaker*, the anonymous compilers insert various instructions for the reader into the fabric of the text, interrupting the cited passage. Thus, for example, Dyer's 'Gronger Hill' is interrupted at one point with the instruction to 'look as if you were absolutely in the situation described by the poet'.<sup>38</sup> This lesion within the textual face is clearly more of a penetration into the text than the first example of marginal reading.

*Sheridan and Henderson's Method* ostensibly sets out to give examples of the practical performances of the two actors – both Sheridan and Henderson earned a living giving public 'readings' of classic texts. It provides us with information regarding the teaching of reading skills in that its proximity to books of practical

<sup>37</sup> A less radical form of this prescriptural textual face can be found in the second half of Sheridan's *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, in which a new system of notation is proposed in order to allow the author to give precise directions for the vocalization of his text. In this instance the text is quite clearly designed for performance as the graphic marks indicating the length of pause and highlighting those words to be given special emphasis demonstrate.

<sup>38</sup> *Sheridan and Henderson's Practical Method of Reading and Reciting English Poetry* (London, 1796), p. 156.

oratory suggests a number of legislative manoeuvres concerning the body. We have already noted that Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* supplies a number of drawings of hand and arm movements for the correct embodiment of the text. A similar physicalization of the textual body into the body of the reader is articulated by *Sheridan and Henderson's Method* which can be seen as legislating for the possibility of an excessive translation from text to body in order to prevent a performance that shatters the correct decorum of social space.

When giving instructions for the correct way of reading Collin's 'Ode on the Passions', for example, we find, in common with a large number of works on elocution, not only those words requiring emphasis specified but also the physical gestures that should accompany them. The following instruction is typical:

After the word 'First' in the beginning of the verse we have now given respecting *Fear*, you ought to pause, and then before you proceed, by your look and manner, express the passion in question. As you pronounce the second line, put out *gently* your hand in rather a *slow fearful* way, as if to lay it upon the chords of an instrument, and then *suddenly withdraw* it when you come to the next line. [33]

These kind of instructions have been remarked upon in chapter 6. Here I want to draw attention to the textual disposition of the instructions, their siting within the text as if they were a part of it: precisely an inclusion of the correct physical response in order to delimit the possibilities for realization. This restriction is absolutely necessary since the 'transported reader', the habitual trope for the eighteenth-century reader, may find that his passions are no longer his own in the highest states of enraptured reading. The reader may be overmastered by a text, which may lead to a loss of person and a concomitant transportation to a place the reader may not wish to go to. Perhaps even more disturbing, the audience may be transported to an altogether different place, something which takes on great importance in the light of the highly charged sexual nature of the reading scene: precisely the point at issue is the place to which one is transported or led – the quiet seclusion of the bed-chamber is governed by a different set of social rules than the rapturous response and collective identity produced in the public drawing room. This restriction via insertion within the text is one form of text management and control operated by eighteenth-century reading theory: by including instructions for physical gesture and tone of voice the possible aberrations in social behaviour produced by an excessive text are avoided.

If we return to the example of Dyer's 'Gronger Hill' and the instruction to look as if 'absolutely in the situation described by the poet' we can follow this control of the text more closely. The constriction placed upon the text is achieved through the graphic interruption of the cited passage at precisely the point where the text threatens to overpower the reader's observance of social decorum. Dyer has described a typical ascent of a mountain in terms of the natural sublime, and precisely at the point where the poet reaches the summit, where the sublime 'rush' would transport him, we find the interruption:

Still the prospect wider spreads  
 Adds a thousand woods and meads;  
 Still it widens, widens still,  
 And sinks the newly-risen hill.  
 Now I gain the mountain's brow:  
 What a landscape lies below!

Look as if you were absolutely in the situation  
 described by the poet. [156]

The threat is effectively defused, the excessive passion or sensation felt by the poet in his sublime transport is precisely textualized, translated into the body of the speaker in imitation of the poet's real rapture. The incision within the text, then, adequately conveys the defusal of this potential unruly excess; it brings the text to law, curing it of its infectious power and censoring the possible translation of the body of the text in all its sublime rapture into the body of the speaker. Consequently the text cannot 'transport' the reader to dangerous places, precisely the text-fear of eighteenth-century theorists; the text is not allowed to run away with the reader, transfusing the sentiments and emotions embedded within it into a series of aberrant gestures and facial expressions, a language of the body that may have been far from sanctioned by the codes of decorous, polite society.<sup>39</sup>

A more unusual example of this text-fear is James Buchanan's *The First Six Books of Milton's Paradise Lost rendered into grammatical construction* (1773). This book, written by a grammarian for the instruction of women, sets out Milton's poem in large type at the top of each page, and gives the 'corrected' version in only slightly smaller type at the bottom. However, because Milton's faults were of two basic kinds according to Buchanan, those of 'transposition', the 'placing of the words of a sentence out of their natural order', and 'ellipsis', the 'suppression or leaving out of a word or words in a sentence', one can easily see how the expanded Buchanan version tends to take up most of the space on the page.

This text follows to the logical extreme the eighteenth-century desire to legislate the text at its face, a desire founded within a text-fear that the reader may be carried away by a text. It is far from content to write in the margins, still less to insert itself within the body of the cited text. Buchanan comes very close to reversing the most common forms of subordination of comment to text, as his

<sup>39</sup> This imitation of the poet's own *physical* responses solders the connection between reader and author, it keeps the reader's physicalization within its proper bounds. That this was a common topos can be noted by the James Gilray print entitled 'Tales of Wonder' which depicts four women at a table, one of whom is reading aloud a horror story to the other three who display various translations of the text into facial expression.

commentary or 'reading' of the poem takes up the prominent position on the page, graphically demonstrating the avowed aim to cure the deranged text of Milton.<sup>40</sup>

Buchanan claims that after having smoked Milton out of his own text the reader is able to 'read this admirable poem with understanding and taste'. We should note, however, that something very different is at work in this conception of reading. Buchanan has effectively taken away the active role of the reader: he has overmastered the text to such an extent that the reader need not look at Milton's original at all, since, as Buchanan has informed us, the poem does not make sense. In graphic terms, the space that the rewrite occupies signifies an enormous increase of the threshold between textual face and margin: the Buchanan version is an infectious disease spreading across the page like an inkblot, threatening to cover over Milton's original and to terrorize the textual face into all boundary, margin, threshold.

This is the most powerful version we have encountered of an eighteenth-century uneasiness in the face of the text. Buchanan clearly aims to make Milton's text harmless, to sanitize and package the text in such a way that the reader is allowed only good clean thoughts and gestures, and in so doing he effectively supplies his own voice in the place of Milton's. The reader is left with the single possibility of mimicking Buchanan's voice, the exemplary reader, perhaps, but also the voice of the law, of the censor. Above all it is the voice of Buchanan and not the text that is 'read', demonstrating the full extent of reading theory's fear and obsession.

Reading theory can be described as the technology of reading: it not only supplies the necessary apparatus for bringing a text into speech, it also constructs itself as self-sufficient. The theory of reading, as technology, hardly needs texts at all since its concerns, its forms and objects of legislation are all parts of that technology. This is why reading theory is so careful in its definition of the proper place, the place where that technology will be most effective. If reading theory is exemplary for all kinds of theoretical discourse then we must assume that theory, as technology, can only legislate the production and the products of that technology. In the second part of this chapter we shall see how reading theory copes with practice by concentrating exclusively on the practice for which it has no theory: the women's reading scene.

<sup>40</sup> There is another tradition of textuality, primarily produced by an exegetical enterprise, which reorders the graphic system of a text's face. This tradition is most notable in commentaries upon sacred texts, and articulates a different set of priorities and relations between commentary, instruction and text. I am grateful to Richard Waswo for pointing out to me the example of the *Glossa Ordinaria* (Strasbourg, 1501), which prints the Bible verses in the centre of the page and surrounds them with commentary.

## THEORY IN PRACTICE: THE WOMAN'S PLACE

*The Reading Habit*

As I have been stressing throughout this chapter, reading theory is required in order to police the activity, but in order to understand this in its full complexity we need to investigate the practice historically. One of our first attempts at describing the 'real' of reading looked towards the social aspect of the activity, noting that the status accorded to someone who could read resulted, at least to some degree, from the scarcity of the skill. This does not square very well with a number of contemporary accounts, such as the following by Thomas Holcroft: indeed if we take this as evidence we might be led into questioning the need for any theory of reading at all:

Books were not then, as they fortunately are now, great or small, on this subject or that, to be found in almost every house: a book, except of prayers, or of daily religious use, was scarcely to be seen but among the opulent, or in the possession of the studious ... I neither had in my possession, nor met with any book of any kind which I had leisure and permission to read through.<sup>41</sup>

Holcroft is referring to the 1750s, the decade during which Charles Leslie also commented: 'For the greatest part of the *people* do not read *books*, most of them cannot *read* at all, but they will gather together about one that can *read*, and listen to an *Observer* or *Review* ...';<sup>42</sup> yet by the end of the century the impression given, at least by some contemporary accounts, was that large numbers of people had joined the ranks of the literate. Thus, James Lackington, the London bookseller who claimed to have had some hand in this remarkable turnaround of events, comments in 1795:

The poorer sort of farmers, and even the poor country people in general, who before that period spent their winter evenings in relating stories of witches, ghosts, hobgoblins etc, now shorten the winter nights by hearing their sons and daughters read tales, romances, etc. and on entering their houses, you may see *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, and other entertaining books, stuck up on their bacon-racks etc. If *John* goes to town with a load of hay, he is charged to be sure not to forget to bring home *Peregrine Pickle's Adventures*; and when *Dolly* is sent to market to sell her eggs, she is commissioned to purchase *The History of Pamela Andrus*. In short, all ranks and degrees now READ. But the most rapid increase of the sale of books has been since the termination of the late war.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft*, I, pp. 134–5; 136.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Leslie, *A View of the Times, their Principles and Practices: in the first volume of the Rehearsals* (London, 1750), p. iv.

<sup>43</sup> James Lackington, *Memoirs of the first forty-five years of the life of James Lackington*, 10th edn, (London, 1795), p. 243.

Lackington is, of course, blowing his own trumpet, since his own hand in the spread of reading material depended upon the 'poor country people' wanting to get hold of books; it is highly unlikely, however, that the picture painted here is accurate. Although the precise extent of the reading public during the latter half of the eighteenth century is very difficult to judge, it would appear, at least from the figures for the sale of the most popular books, that only a very small part of the population *bought* books. Of course, this does not tell us how many people actually read them.<sup>44</sup> Although it is quite clear that the number of people who were able both to read and to buy reading material increased during the latter half of the century, the precise details concerning the social composition and geographical location of the newly literate are difficult to find.<sup>45</sup>

A further general point concerning this increase in the numbers of people reading should be made before we can begin to outline the intervention made by reading theory within the practice. As has been remarked with great frequency the enormous increase in printed materials includes the 'new' form of reading matter, fiction or the novel. These new readers were not ploughing their way through Harriss's *Hermes* or Hutcheson's *Enquiry*; rather, so the story goes, they were devouring novels and romances at an alarming pace. What is more, this new form of reading material was, by and large, seen as a feminine obsession. If

<sup>44</sup> Alick in his *The English Common Reader* gives various figures for the number of copies the most popular novels sold: *Joseph Andrus* sold 6500 copies in three editions during thirteen months; *Roderick Random* sold 5000 in the first year; the second printing of *Clarissa Harlowe* of 3000 copies lasted two years; *Amelia* sold out the first edition of 5000 copies in a week; the first edition of *Sir Charles Grandison* amounted to 4000 copies; the third edition produced within four months of the first was 2500. The population during the period has been estimated as between six and seven million, thus, when one considers that the first editions of most of the above novels seldom exceeded 4000 the number of people who bought these books in relation to the total population was very small. Of course the circulating libraries confuse these statistics, as one copy may have been read by a considerably larger number of people. See Alick, pp. 49–50; but also note that Marjorie Plant in *The English Book Trade, An Economic History of the Making and Sale of books*, 2nd edn (London, 1969), p. 92 claims that between 1714 and 1774 on average only 100 titles a year were published, rising to merely 372 between 1792 and 1802. For a contemporary account see *The real character of the Age, in a letter to the Rev. Dr Brown, occasioned by his Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (London, 1757), p. 16: 'Nor is it true that Novels and their kindred Trash employ the Hours of those who read: it was unjust this should be said, and most unlucky you should say it. Who has more Readers than you? Not Sir Charles Grandison himself. This is an Instance quite unanswerable: the Age is not so idle nor so ignorant as you supposed, and you must own you found them better than you fancied.'

<sup>45</sup> The most useful work I have found on this is Kaufman, *Libraries and their users*, which collects a series of essays on libraries; it does not, however, give details for the purchase of books, or their distribution through the circulating libraries, since, as Kaufman points out, no evidence for such borrowings exists. This presents something of an intractable problem for an accurate account of the eighteenth-century reading public.

we are to take account of the production of a theory of reading in historical terms we will need, therefore, to situate it in relation to these changing contexts for the activity.

Seen in this light the insistence on the public reading of books, the voicing aloud that we have noticed in works of reading theory, represents an attempt to legislate, if not outlaw, the private consumption of romances and novels. As will become apparent, such a legislation of the reading activity represents a strenuous intervention within the network of social, and more importantly, sexual relations and gender distinctions: to read a 'proper' text out loud with the 'proper' intonation and gestures is to assert one's masculinity, while to read a titillating novel in private is to fall into effeminate sentimentality. Furthermore, reading theory can be seen as *forcing* women into the position of deranged novel readers, as excluding them from the scene of seduction, the public reading, just as the denial of a classical education denied them the possibility of reading the traditional staple of educated men, the classics. This is a complicated network, since women may also be seen as constructing for themselves their 'reading scene', the interior private space of the solitary novel reader, in which they could produce or see reflected their own self-image, and perhaps construct or experience their own subjectivity. Thus, where the male may have needed the public reading scene in order to parade and preen his masculinity in front of an admiring audience, the female may have taken considerable relief in her retreat into the private world of fantasy.<sup>46</sup> These two competing strains are, of course, more than apparent in the eighteenth-century conception of both the place of women, and, more to the point, the place of the women's reading scene.

If one writes the history of eighteenth-century reading theory in terms of the disorders within practice which it locates and attempts to contain, then the extent to which the theory can be seen as both a response to and an enabling of the practice becomes apparent. This pathology is nowhere more insistent than in the interrogation of the place of reading. As we have already noted the textual place of the act of reading was deeply problematic for eighteenth-century theorists; the place of reading within the text determines the various positions that the reader may take *vis-a-vis* the author or the audience. However, the actual physical place of the public reading is also of crucial importance.

If we begin by noting in the most general terms that the organization of public space during the eighteenth century was rigorously controlled, we can immediately see the ramifications of a highly structured social space for the reading

<sup>46</sup> My comments here are deliberately speculative and noncommittal because, as shall become apparent, the dividing line of gender never cuts cleanly or into two equal sections. This is to say that precisely the opposite reasons and causes may also have obtained, that the male craved the interior private scene and wished to keep that place for himself. This is discussed below.

activity.<sup>47</sup> Eighteenth-century reading practice not only coded the kind of location in which a reader performed, but was also conditioned by the gender of the reader and of the audience. Thus, a woman might read out loud in the open air but a man would be more likely to read in the interior space of a public room within the house to a mixed audience. A woman could read in private on her own in a bedchamber, but a man read on his own in a formal public room.<sup>48</sup>

This kind of rigid separation of activities according to gender and localization within the interior space of the house was gradually broken down as architectural logic and taste began to penetrate the social and familial construction of the household. The library, for example, became a highly prized addition to the country house. Where a century before it had hardly been warranted in view of the very small number of books owned by country gentlemen, it became, towards mid-century, an increasingly popular interior space. As books became more available and the social status of owning a large collection attracted higher value the need and desire for a library correspondingly increased. However, the need for a neutral social space within the country house where men and women could mix in a range of social activities, from card playing to reading silently, also contributed to that need and desire. Such a library scene in which a wider range of pursuits can be seen in action was described by the Rev. Stotherd Abdy:

... we rummaged all the book-cases, examined the knick knacks upon the toilet, and set a parcel of shells a-dancing in vinegar. Lady Mary and Miss Archer worked; Mr. Houbton gazed with admiration upon his future bride; Mrs. Abdy and Mr. Archer were engaged in stamping crests upon doilys with the new invented composition; and I read to the company a most excellent chapter out of the *Art of Inventing, addressed to the Patrons of Humble Companions*.<sup>49</sup>

As we can see from this description the library represented a neutral social place where men and women could both be found reading in public, either aloud to an

<sup>47</sup> The extent to which public space was policed can perhaps be seen from the period's attachment to the formal *unstructured* space, the place where the rigorous policing of the public was relaxed, and moreover seen to be relaxed. I am thinking here of the carnival or masquerade and of the highly informative account given it by Terry Castle in her *Masquerade and Criticism* (London, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> These comments require historical specificity – the places in which the reading activity takes place change over the course of the century. I do not wish to develop this spatialization in any detail, merely to register the fact. At the end of the century, for example, Hannah More can be found bewailing the fact that women factory workers might be read to, which would both interrupt their work and make one of their number indolent, indicating the extremely rapid growth of reading as an activity, and the corresponding increase in the number of situations in which the activity was carried out. See Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols (London, 1799), 1, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 209.

audience, or silently to themselves. The visual play of sexual attraction is noteworthy since it underlies the full complexity of the scene of reading as a scene of seduction, even though in this instance it is not the reader who is 'coming on' to his audience, but particular members of that audience to each other. The library, then, as a new form of social space enables and participates within a redefinition of social-sexual codes of behaviour – a classification which is commensurate with the activities sanctioned by or allowed to occupy that new space. Clearly one of the activities most likely to be engaged in was reading.

However, the intervention of women novel readers into the spatial economy of social relations produces a new set of problems: if one was hopelessly addicted to narrative, as women were widely held to be, then the 'habit' would be indulged at any time of the day, and frequently in any place. Thus, the *Lady's Magazine* comments upon women reading while having their hair dressed: 'Hair-dressing has been very serviceable to reading; look at the popular books of a circulating library, and you will find the binding cracked by quantities of powder and permatum between the leaves – the Booksellers never complain of this – The book is certainly spoiled.'<sup>50</sup> This amusing portrait of daily life is, as we shall see in the section on the place of woman, more significant than first sight might suggest. Reading while having one's hair dressed is one thing, but the reading disease may lead to far more improper situations, here pointed out by William Combe:

Indeed so infatuated is she to that kind of study that she has the cover of a book ornamented with religious emblems, in which she never fails to take a volume from the circulating library . . . so that while the . . . clergyman is enforcing the duties of morality and religion, she is actually amusing herself with an high flown epistle from some Lady Elizabeth, to some confidential Harriet; considering the difficulties of romantic passion, lamenting the miseries of unsuccessful love, or enjoying the unexpected union of some persecuted and faithful pair.<sup>51</sup>

It is noteworthy that these 'improper' sites for the reading activity are all places where women read.

We can see from this that the most obvious legislative manoeuvres performed by reading theory are directed at what it takes to be, positions as, women's practice; this, we might assume, is in direct response to the radical increase in the number of readers, the greater part of whom we are led to believe were women novel readers. Theory is faced, then, with the task of either theorizing this new activity, of finding a place for it within the already existing theoretical framework of the reading scene, or, alternatively, with the task of excluding such an activity from the domain legislated by theory, a domain we have

<sup>50</sup> *Lady's Magazine* XX (April, 1789), p. 177.

<sup>51</sup> William Combe, *The Devil upon Two Sticks in England* (London, 1791), II, p. 83.

identified as the public reading scene.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, it may be argued that it could only have excluded women novel readers since the theory of reading is in part based on assumptions which are derived from the discourse on the sublime, a legislative discourse that openly excludes the feminine from the experience it describes, the sublime, through its absolute distinction between a masculine sublimity and feminine beauty. Thus, reading theory, if it is to hold to those assumptions which are founded upon the mimetic model whereby the reader imitates as precisely as possible the author, who was, of course, until the rise of the novel almost exclusively presumed to be male, it cannot include women without either revising the notions of gender, and the more general deployment of sexuality and gender division in eighteenth-century discourse complicit with those notions, or abandoning the bases upon which a theory of reading had been founded. This choice, which was very unlikely to have been recognized as a choice, produces the tensions we are about to describe.

The initial attempt made by theory to legislate women novel readers was to claim strenuously that novels were degenerate, and that they would corrupt their readers. This corruption in its weakest form is seen as the relaxing of the intellect, the softening of the mind: 'Novels, therefore, have circulated chiefly among the giddy and licentious of both sexes, who read, not for the sake of thinking, but for the want of thought.'<sup>53</sup> Hannah More in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* insists, as we shall see below, that women should read 'hard' books, a comment that compounds the sexual implications of the above comment: to read 'easy' sentimental novels is to indulge in trivial feminine pursuits and to wallow in thoughtless licentiousness.

In fiction itself one can often find parodic comment on the activity of novel reading, which suggests that there was a very high profile indeed of its adverse effects. This is compounded by the question concerning the gender of the reader, so that a man was certainly made to feel 'unmanly' if he pursued this fem-

<sup>52</sup> This exclusion was effected astonishingly easily so that well into the nineteenth century Lamb can remark: 'Books of quick interest, that hurry on for the eye to glide over only. It will not do to read them out. I could never listen to even the better kind of modern novels without extreme irksomeness.' Charles Lamb, *The Last Essays of Elia* (London, 1833), p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> *Monthly Review* XXIV (June, 1761), p. 415. See also Richard Steele in *Guardian* 60: '...this unsettled way of reading . . . which naturally seduces us into an undetermined manner of thinking . . . That assemblage of words which is called a style becomes utterly annihilated . . . The common defence of this people is, that they have no design in reading but for pleasure, which I think should rather arise from reflection and remembrance of what one had read, than from the transient satisfaction of what one does, and we should be pleased proportionately as we are profited.' Knox, *Essays* XIV: 'If it be true, that the present age is more corrupt than the preceding, the great multiplication of Novels has probably contributed to its degeneracy. Fifty years ago there was scarcely a novel in the Kingdom.' p. 27.

inine occupation. In fact the stigma attached to novel reading was such that a man would have been unlikely to have admitted to pursuing the activity. A corollary of this is that the activity became more and more covert as the 'punters' felt uncomfortable on entering a bookseller or library and requesting the latest steamy Minerva Press production. John Moore comments in 1797: 'many people are at pains to declare, that for their part they never read novels: a declaration sometimes made by persons of both sexes who never read anything else.'<sup>54</sup> In this sense the novel was increasingly seen as an illicit form of textuality, the kind that one might want to carry in a plain wrapper.<sup>55</sup> This contemporary sense of illicit pleasure is present to Courtney Melmoth's *Family Secrets*, for example, in which the bookseller Page describes the various customers who visit his premises explicitly in terms of their embarrassment at purchasing the latest fiction. After sketching one Lady who is quite brazen about her 'habit', followed by a second who requests works of philosophy along with 'some nonsense for the servants', i.e. some fiction for herself, we are treated to the following description of the archetypal 'closet' novel reader:

'O! but, I must not forget to mention my *whisperers*, most of whom send credentials: – or, such as venture themselves, hem, cough, blush, stammer, and so forth – have I got this? Could I get that? for – for – a friend in the country? Others desire me to make up a parcel to penny-post list – ready – money – own price – no questions asked – to be called for, – cash in hand – and all in the way of *smug*. Thus I dispose of my good things', quoth Page; 'sometimes tucked between muslins, cambrics, silks, satins, and the like, or rolled into a bundle, then thrown into a coach by some of my fair smugglers: the older ones, meanwhile, Mams and Dads, never the wiser.'<sup>56</sup>

However, while such social stigma is representative of one form of social legislation imposed upon the inexorable increase of both texts and readers, it also produces the illicit pleasure attaching to a forbidden activity. Thus the social enforcement of 'proper' reading has both positive and negative effects, and judging from its failure to arrest the consumption of novels the negative pleasurable effects would appear to have outweighed the positive. The reasons for this are complex, but certainly have some connections to the formulaic

<sup>54</sup> *A View of the Commencement and Progress of Romance*, prefixed to *The Works of Tobias Smollet, M.D., with memoirs of his life*, 8 vols (London, 1797), I, p. xcii. See also *The Autobiography of Francis Place*, ed. Mary Thrale (Cambridge, 1972), p. 223.

<sup>55</sup> The persistence of this sense of illicit textuality is amusingly highlighted by Lamb's comments upon being 'discovered' by a 'damsel' while he was reading *Pamela* to himself on Primrose Hill in London. See *The Last Essays of Elia*, pp. 52–3.

<sup>56</sup> Courtney Melmoth [Samuel Jackson Pratt], *Family Secrets*, 5 vols (London, 1797), I, pp. 388–9.

repetitiveness of these narratives, which enable very unskilled readers to learn, almost by heart, one story and to 'read' it over and over again as a kind of presence at 'real' reading. Once the social stigma attached to illiteracy outweighs that connected to the type of material read it becomes more and more important to give the outward show of being literate, and less important to concern oneself with the intrinsic value of the material. It would be well beyond the scope of the present work to describe in any detail the longevity and attraction of what we call today 'pulp fiction'. Suffice it to note here that the interchangeable nature of such narratives was remarked upon even as these fictions were beginning to be mass produced. Thus an article in the *Arist* of June 1807 claims that the addicts are 'so devoted to novel-reading, that they admire on novel because it puts them in mind of another, which they admired a few days before. By them it is required, that a novel should be like a novel'.<sup>57</sup> We can see this constant derision of both the novel and novel readers as one of the weak forms of legislation against certain kinds of reading activity; however, we may conjecture that it was clearly far from enough to curb the novel-reading obsession, since reading theory finds rather stronger ways of describing the ill effects of this pastime.

Beattie, for example claimed that the young readers of novels or romances had a high propensity to fall into criminal activity: 'A habit of reading them breeds a dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature, and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant

<sup>57</sup> Cited in J.T. Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel* (New York, 1943), p. 48; the present discussion is much indebted to this neglected book. See also Burton, *Lectures on female education and manners*, I, p. 188: 'But the advantages of Reading can only be derived from a proper choice of Books. That course of Reading must be unprofitable, which is confined to Novels; and this, I am apprehensive, is too much the case with your Sex. The Press daily teems with these publications, which are the trash of circulating Libraries. There are but few Novels, which have a tendency to give a right turn to the affections; or, at least, are calculated to improve the mind. A Perusal of them, in rapid succession, is, in fact, a misemployment of time; as, in most Novels, there is a similarity in the incidents and characters; and these perhaps are unnatural, or seldom to be found in real life: so that young Women, who apply themselves to this sort of Reading, are liable to many errors, both in conduct and conversation, from the romantic notions they will thence imbibe. Novels are the last Books which they should read: instead of being almost the first... This is a generally held opinion, and can be found in a large number of periodical essays and works on education. See *The polite lady*, Letter XVIII, 'On the Choice of Books'; Catherine Macaulay Graham, *Letters on education* (Dublin, 1790), Letter XV; Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (Derby, 1797), pp. 33–7; James Burgh, *Thoughts on Education* (London, 1747), pp. 55–6; *Thoughts on the Times, but chiefly on the profligacy of our women*, [Francis Foster] (London, 1779), pp. 41–4; Honoria, *The Female Mentor; or, Select Conversations*, 3 vols (London, 1793), pp. 112–3; *The World*, no. 79 (against romances); *The Lounger*, no. 20 (on the debasement of the novel); *The Royal Female Magazine*, I (on romances as unsuitable for women readers); *Lady's Museum*, I, no. 1; *Literary Magazine*, II (April–May 1757), pp. 130ff; *Monthly Review*, XXIV (April, 1761), p. 260; (June, 1761), p. 415; XXVI (March, 1762), p. 236.

thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities.<sup>58</sup> Such criminal acts may range from parental neglect, as the mother indulges her insistent craving for narrative:

Women of every age, of every ambition, contract and retain a taste for novels . . . the depravity is universal. My sight is everywhere offended by these foolish, yet dangerous, books. I find them in the toilette of fashion, and in the work-bag of the sempstress; in the hands of the *Lady*, who lounges on the sofa, and of the *Lady*, who sits at the counter. From the *mistresses* of nobles they descend to the *mistresses* of snuff-shops – from the belles who read them in town, to the chits who spell them in the country. I have actually seen mothers, in miserable garrets, *crying for the imaginary distress of an heroine*, while their children were *crying for bread*; and the mistress of a family losing hours over a novel in the parlour, while her maids, in emulation of the example, were similarly employed in the kitchen. I have seen a scullion-wench with a dishcloth in one hand, and a novel in the other, sobbing over the sorrows of *Julia* or a *Jemina*.<sup>59</sup>

to the complete breakdown of familial and social relations:

The *genteel* education she has received has elevated her above the humble offices of housekeeping; she despises her parents, and their vulgar shop, or loom garret; she seeks in novels and dissipation, some means of escaping from her present condition; and at length, as too frequent experience demonstrates, she falls a victim to seduction. How indeed could it be otherwise.<sup>60</sup>

This last citation demonstrates the full implications of the women's reading scene, which is entangled within and a necessary part of the debate concerning female education. In spite of the efforts of many female pioneers, women's education remained throughout the century, by and large, centred on polite skills: dancing, music, and certain 'female' pursuits such as sewing. Women, if educated at all, were more likely to receive 'academic' tuition from their mothers or fathers, who might teach them how to read for their instruction rather than amusement.<sup>61</sup> Because of this, a very common stricture was that instruction should be first and foremost *moral* instruction, and that, therefore, the material one chose to read be ethically instructive: one read to 'improve' oneself. In the light of this it is hardly surprising that there seemed to be a con-

<sup>58</sup> 'On Fable and Romance', in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London, 1783), p. 574.

<sup>59</sup> *Sylph* No V (6 Oct 1795), pp. 35–8.

<sup>60</sup> J.L. Chirrol, *An Enquiry into the Best System of Female Education; or, Boarding school and home education attentively considered* (London, 1809), p. 234.

<sup>61</sup> See Sarah Fielding, *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (London, 1749), p. v. . . . what is the true use of Reading; and if you can once fix this Truth in your Minds, namely, that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better.'

stant fight against the licentious and illicit novel, a text which merely entertained, and a corresponding insistence on 'hard' or 'improving' literature:

I rank this [reading] amongst the elegant and rational Amusements; for there are but few things which can afford us greater pleasure or improvement, especially if we peruse the superior works of our finest Authors, such as Lord Lyttleton, Dr Young, Dr Goldsmith, Pope, Swift, Addison . . . I believe, there are many Ladies who neglect this refined Amusement, for want of proper, entertaining, and sensible Subjects: – The Press issuing forth daily such swarms of insipid Novels, destitute of sentiment, language, or morals, which serve more as a reproach upon our taste than an improvement to our minds. I might here expatiate upon the evil tendency of the looser kind of Novels, but this I shall decline, as, I think, they carry a kind of protection along with them, in being so exceedingly contemptible, that no persons of common delicacy would sacrifice their more valuable time upon such barren, wretched performances.<sup>62</sup>

Sadly, although there were by the end of the century a large number of 'academies' or boarding schools for women, the instruction they provided was very often non-existent – a fact often remarked upon.<sup>63</sup> Advertisements for pupils, for example, would claim all kinds of bogus merits for the particular system of education provided, but a constant feature of these claims was that the pupils were not allowed to read novels.<sup>64</sup> Such claims cannot often have been believed since it was widely held that these female academies provided a large part of the market for 'light' reading:

It is a fact that girls at schools procure what books they please, through the day scholars, or the parlour boarders, who have liberty to go wherever they please, or sometimes through the servants. They read them in bed in summer, as soon as it is day-light, they lend them to one another; and it is a fact, that there is no book, however immoral and repugnant to all the sentiments of modesty, but what finds its way into these seminaries.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *New and Elegant Amusements for the Ladies of Great Britain, by a Lady* (London, 1772), pp. 51–2. Rather interestingly this book ranks two kinds of 'Amusement': the first, 'Rational Amusements' gives the following hierarchy: The use of the Globes; Geography and maps; Astronomy; Reading; Epistolatory Correspondence, or Letter Writing; Poetry; Music; and Dancing; while the second, 'Entertaining Amusements' gives: Dancing; Theatrical Amusements; and Singing.

<sup>63</sup> See among many, *Reflections arising from the Immorality of the Present Age* (London, 1750), pp. 15–16: 'And under this influence [an upper servant] she remains till the time of sending her to one of those polite repositories of beauty called a boarding-school, where some branch of unprofitable needle-work, a little reading and writing, with as much musick and dancing as she is capable of attaining, make up the sum total of what she is designed to know.'

<sup>64</sup> See, on this, Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel*, pp. 60–2.

<sup>65</sup> J.L. Chirrol, *An Enquiry*, p. 110, p.



Part of the reason for the rapid success of the novel stems from the fact that women were rarely if ever taught to read the classical languages, thereby making texts in the vernacular their only option. As we have already seen they were often deemed unfit to read the great poetic texts, such as *Paradise Lost*, and, as the enormous number of 'Elegant Extracts' bears witness to, the level of their reading skill was assumed to be such that the stamina required for an entire text was lacking.<sup>66</sup> A further seduction to women readers was presented by the narratives contained in the novel itself; these often portrayed 'romantic' love matches, a fact which needs careful contextualization within the 'real' of the social, for it would appear from a cursory glance that marriage based on the star-struck lovers' model was healthily discouraged given that property relations were still of considerable importance for the economics of wedlock.

This is a very complicated issue which need not unduly detain the argument since our focus is on the siting of the romantic love match within reading theory. In this regard we can note that such marriages were almost universally condemned by reading theorists. It was claimed that women might be led into believing they could behave as the heroines in the novels they read, or perhaps even worse be seduced into marrying a look-alike from a sentimental novel only to find out that the resemblance was illusory:

The catastrophe and the incidents of these fictitious narratives commonly turn on the vicissitudes and effects of a passion the most powerful of all those which agitate the human heart. Hence the study of them frequently creates a susceptibility of impression, and a premature warmth of tender emotions, which, not to speak of other possible effects, have been known to betray young women into a sudden attachment to persons unworthy of their affection, and thus to hurry them into marriages terminating in unhappiness.<sup>67</sup>

It is clearly the case that the novel is far from innocent in its obsessive portrayal of romantic love matches: the assault upon eighteenth-century ideology as it

<sup>66</sup> These collections, often called 'Beauties', were used for the instruction both of boys and girls. Boys presumably graduated to the real thing whereas girls were thought to remain at the extract level.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, 13th edn (London, 1823), p. 148. It should be pointed out that precisely the opposite reasons for such unhappiness were also given, so that the fault was seen to lie in the man's court not the woman's. Thus, the female perspective puts it: 'There is always one hero, on whom the heroine fixes her inclination. The girl who is conversant with this species of composition will expect to find such an hero in the world: the first man who pays her any particular attention, will soon make an impression upon her already-prepared heart; and she will conclude, that her partiality is founded on a laudable object. But when a man is assiduous in his attention, and seems attached, ought she always to flatter herself that he is in earnest? he appears to like her now; will he continue in the same inclination? may not a little time dissipate his partiality?'. Honoria, *The Female Mentor; or, Select Conversations*, 3 vols (London, 1793), I, pp. 113-14.

relates to the institution of marriage is a constant factor of the 'rise of the novel', just as the insistence on the part of reading theorists that women not read novels participates within the ruling ideologies which informed male notions of the place of women. Joseph Robertson, for example, states in his *An Essay on the Education of young ladies*:

A young woman, who employs her time in reading novels, will never find amusement in any other books. Her mind will be soon debauched by licentious descriptions, and lascivious images; and she will consequently remain the same insignificant creature through life; her mind will become a magazine of trifles and follies, or rather impure and wanton ideas. Her favourite novels will never teach her the social virtues, the qualifications of domestic life, the principles of her native language, history, geography, morality, the precepts of christianity, or any other useful science. For, many of those compositions, which are thrown out upon the world by idle scribblers, silly women, or impertinent coxcombs in literature, are crude and hasty effusions, written in mean and vulgar language, or with an affected pomp of expression; and abound with characters, images, and sentiments of levity and licentiousness.<sup>68</sup>

We can note from a number of the examples above that the trajectory of these legislative accounts was towards a pathology of the reading activity in which the 'habit' of novel reading might come to be described as some kind of disease.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Robertson, *An Essay on the Education of young ladies* (London, 1798), pp. 44-5.

<sup>69</sup> This is in fact precisely the form of attack taken in *Nymphomania; or a Dissertation concerning Furor Uterinus* translated from the French in 1775, p. 76: 'The perusal of a novel, a voluptuous picture, a lascivious song, the conversation, and the caress of some seducing man, soon excite those emotions, of which but the moment before, she declared herself the mistress, and imagined that she could, perpetually, have suppressed them'. This text, interestingly, claims that the imagination is the cause of nymphomania. It should also be noted here that I have neglected to pursue the distinctions made between the novel and romance, preferring to take them as, by and large, synonymous. This was not taken to be the case for many writers, but to include the distinction would have been to complicate the argument unnecessarily. While many felt the novel, exemplified most often by Fielding and Richardson, to be a high and responsible moral form, most thought the 'romance', to be found most often in the circulating library, beneath contempt. However, the distinctions between the two were not so easily maintained or policed, and many 'novels' were also thought to be licentious. This is further complicated by the history of the romance form, which was generally held to have been a worthy and uplifting type of textuality sometime back in the past - it had merely become unworthy and only recently fallen from its moral height. A reviewer in the *Monthly Review* XXIV (June, 1761), p. 415, put it in the following way: 'The genius of romance seems to have been long since drooping among us; and has, of late been generally displayed only for the basest purposes, either to raise the grin of idiotism by its buffonery, or stimulate the prurience of sensuality by its obscenity. Novels, therefore, have circulated chiefly among the giddy and licentious of both sexes, who read, not for the sake of thinking, but for the want of thought.'

So shameful a prostitution has brought this species of writing into such disrepute, that if the more serious and solid reader is at any time tempted to cast an eye over the pages of romance, he almost blushed to confess his curiosity.'

This is the strongest form of theory's legislation, suggesting that once the activity of reading novels is begun it soon develops into an excessive and unruly obsession, an addiction that can only be cured by the strongest remedy. This addiction is often seen as the direct result of narrative itself; the desire to follow the trajectory of a narrative to its close, as Thomas Gisborne remarks:

To indulge in a practice of reading novels is, in several other particulars, liable to produce mischievous effects. Such compositions are, to most persons, extremely engaging. That story must be singularly barren, or wretchedly told, of which, after having heard the beginning, we desire not to know the end. To the pleasure of learning the ultimate fortunes of the heroes and heroines of the tale, the novel commonly adds in a greater or lesser degree, that which arises from animated description, from lively dialogue, or from interesting sentiment. Hence the perusal of one publication of this class leads, with much more frequency than is the case with respect to works of other kinds, except of dramatic writings . . . to the speedy perusal of another. Thus a habit is formed, a habit at first perhaps of limited indulgence, but a habit that is continually found more formidable and more encroaching. The appetite becomes too keen to be denied; and in proportion as it is more urgent, grows less nice and select in its force.<sup>70</sup>

A further complication arises as the events narrated begin to take on the aura of the real.<sup>71</sup> Such confusion between real and imaginary is encouraged by the

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry*, pp. 147–8. This obsession became so worrying and widespread during the nineteenth century that it was construed quite specifically as a disease to be treated by medicine – ‘the novel-reading disease’.

<sup>71</sup> This is connected to the attempt to recreate the stories and events found in novels in real life through the writing of further novels. Hannah More, for example, claims that the transformation of a novel reader into a novel writer is both devastatingly easy, and to be avoided at all cost: ‘Neither is there any fear that this sort of reading will convert ladies into authors. The direct contrary effect will be likely to be produced by the perusal of writers who throw the generality of readers at such an unapproachable distance as to check presumption, instead of exciting it. Who are those ever multiplying authors, that with unparalleled fecundity are overstocking the world with their quick-succeeding progeny? They are NOVEL-WRITERS; the easiness of whose productions is at once the cause of their own fruitfulness, and of the almost infinitely numerous race of imitators to whom they give birth. Such is the frightful facility of this species of composition, that every raw girl, while she reads, is tempted to fancy that she can also write. . . . so a thorough-paced novel-reading Miss, at the close of every tissue of hackney'd adventures, feels within herself the striking impulse of corresponding genius, and triumphantly exclaims, ‘And I too am an author!’ *Strictures*, I, pp. 188–9.

This coalescence of consumption with production is perhaps the most troublesome effect of the novel-reading disease because it suggests that there is no end to the continual spiral: the more one reads the more one fancies oneself an author; one book of fiction produces another and so on. It can also be remarked that the epistolary form not only enabled this open-ended continual production, it also encouraged it and was founded upon it, as the textual histories of Richardson's narratives admirably show. The most remarkable case of readers attempting to participate in the narratives constructed by an author in the period is that of Rousseau and his readers, the subject of an illuminating essay by Robert Darnion, *The Great Cat Masseur* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 209–49.

‘desire’ of the reader, the wish to participate within the ‘happy family’ she sees in the narratives she consumes. This fantasy experience, however, should it be realized leads to disaster:

For a week, or possibly a month after commencing the state of wedlock, the parties may continue in their mutual deception. . . . Each is surprised on discovering the other to be merely a *mortal*: reciprocal accusations of dissimulation and perfidy ensue, and are followed by dislike, and dislike by detestation: their asperities of temper are not softened by the imperious necessity of providing for the wants of children, whom they can scarcely feed, and (for obvious reasons) cannot educate. And thus we have two divinities transformed into two fiends, who propagate a race of sons and daughters – doomed, like themselves, to suffer future misery, and to inflict it; to encumber, not serve, their native land; and, imbibing the parental taste, to become, not the encouragers of useful arts and elegant studies, but of a tribe of illiterate and rapacious miscreants, who can earn a livelihood by infusing immorality and absurdity into the general mind, and accumulate not only wealth, but celebrity, by writing novels.<sup>72</sup>

The close imitation of the disease Mangin wishes to cure is interesting, as his discourse swells with its own sense of ‘celebrity’,<sup>73</sup> but even more noteworthy is the suggestion that such confusion between the imaginary and the real can only lead to social degeneration, a fall from the heights of polite society.

Mangin is merely rearticulating the very common conception that a healthy society is reflected or even produced by healthy literature and reading habits; a concept as productive for Johnson as Sheridan, Leavis or Fish. However, the insistence on the novel and its readers as unhealthy has powerful ramifications for the place of women.

<sup>72</sup> Rev. Edward Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading* (London, 1808), p. 21–22. This discrepancy between the real and the imaginary had been commented upon for a considerable time. Dorothy Gardiner quotes Hicke's *Fenelon* to the same effect: ‘Young women without Instruction and Application have always a revolving Imagination. For want of solid Nourishment, their Curiosity violently turns them toward vain and dangerous Objects. Such as have a little Capacity are in danger to set up for Wits; they read, for this, all the Books that may feed their Vanity: they are extremely affected with Romances, with Plays, with the Relations of Chimerical Adventures. . . . using themselves to the magnificent Language of Heroes or Heroines in Romances, they spoil themselves hereby for Converse in the World. . . . A poor raw Girl, whose Head is fill'd with the moving and surprising strains which have charm'd her in her Reading, is astonished not to find in the World real Persons who may answer to these Romanick Heroes. Fain would she live like those imaginary Princesses. . . . always Charming, always Ador'd, always above all kind of Want: What a Disgrace must it be then for her to descend from this Heroical state down to the meanest parts and Offices of Housewifery.’ Cited in Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (Oxford, 1929), p. 365.

<sup>73</sup> The essay was delivered to a literary club in Sussex, probably mainly composed of women, so that the swelling of his discourse and the tenor of his remarks take on a number of interesting associations.

## Women Reading

As we have seen, reading theory itself constructs its deviant practice, the reading of novels in private. It construes this activity as an aberrant form in order to police the social and its attendant constructions of gender difference. It is clear that it should do this from every perspective covered in the preceding discussion: from the social and political motives which determined the debate over education, to the more widespread problems of proprietorial exchange which characterize so many eighteenth-century discourses, and which open the question of ownership, of text or voice, or person.<sup>74</sup> The male reader perfects his proprietorial manner by practising his reading; he perfects his proper person, his personality through the activity of reading. The woman, unfortunately, reads the wrong texts, in the wrong places, even if she reads in public with the right gestures and intonation. None of this matters, however, since she is engaged in a private, internalized activity, and her needs concerning the ownership of person are radically different from the man's: her position is one of adornment, ornamentation, the listener more often than the reader; the transported, seduced audience more often than the ravisher or masterful reader.<sup>75</sup>

It is against the terrifying disorder seen in the last section, the possibility of an unending series of textual procreations, that the male description and articulation of a women's reading scene is proposed.<sup>76</sup> If we return to an earlier point concerning the different perspectives we might take on these questions, we can turn our attention to another possibility: the deliberate encouragement on the part of women of the 'disease' or obsessive behaviour attributed to them by

<sup>74</sup> The question over property rights *vis-à-vis* texts holds considerable fascination for the theorists under discussion. Indeed, one further instance of the need to bring textuality to law is provided by the debate over the ownership of literary property – the ideas, rhymes, harmonious expression and so forth contained in a text. Essentially this debate followed the same kinds of legislative problems as the ownership of the text to be read or the ownership of the voice that brought the text into speech. The need for such legislation was also seen as a direct result of the chaos that would ensue were there none: see *An Enquiry into the Nature and origin of Literary Property* (London, 1762), p. 21: 'What numerous Inconveniences would arise, if every Man could at his Pleasure, create a new Species of Property, to the Support of which he might demand the Aid of the Law, however repugnant to its principles. As if the wild Imaginations of Men were to control the Law, and not the Law to curb their Extravagancies.' For a collection of tracts on this debate see Stephen Parks, *The Literary Property Debate: Six Tracts 1764–1774* (New York, 1975).

<sup>75</sup> This point is made by reference to the difficulty of reading in public in the *Polite Lady*, pp. 4–5: 'To be able to read with propriety, is certainly a very genteel accomplishment, and not so easy to be acquired as most people imagine; and, perhaps, you will not find one woman in five hundred that is possessed of it. There are so many faulty ways of reading, which young people are apt to run into, that it is difficult to avoid them all: and when once a bad habit is contracted, it is almost impossible to correct it.' The telling phrase here, of course, is 'that is possessed of it.'

reading theory. Consequently, another way of describing the intervention of reading theory within practice is to regard the construction of the woman novel reader from the women's side, essentially seeing the private 'imaginary' reading scene as the locus for the experience of a feminized subjectivity.<sup>77</sup> This opposing symptomatic description of the novel-reading obsession is present in reading theory, albeit as the negative or outlawed possibility, so that theory itself, in its exclusion of the aberrant feminized reading of novels, can be seen as producing the very possibility of its negation, of setting out the terrain upon which a feminized subjectivity could be mapped. In conclusion, then, I want to force reading theory to articulate its own resistance, and to construe that resistance as the realization, the bringing into the real, of a feminized experience of person, ownership of self, sexuality.

In the citation from More's *Strictures*, for example, the connection between reading novels and producing them is clearly articulated through the notion of generation: the most basic distinction of gender, the bearing of progeny, is used to differentiate the woman's reading scene from that of the man. The woman, in reading her sentimental novel, splits her attention between the fantasy on the page and the fantasy she is stimulated into producing in her head. She does not follow Whately's command that one must forget that one is engaged in the activity, giving up one's sense of self in order to become the mere transparency through which the text speaks: instead 'while she reads' she 'is tempted to fancy that she can also write'. This fancy comes over her as she consumes one after another of almost undifferentiated narratives, presumably hardly even noticing that they are all the same since she is more taken by the capacity of the material to stimulate fancies or day-dreams than by the educational or improving value of the stories.

The woman reads as process not event; she reads in order to maintain a constant stimulation of her fancy, racing through the narrative in order to bring the events described into as quick succession as possible, and in order to maintain her arousal while wishing, at the same time, to defer concluding for as long as

<sup>76</sup> The following analysis is to be seen as a description of theory's articulation of the women's reading scene, and not as a description of any 'real' female reading activity; precisely as the ideological and legislative practices articulated by 'male' reading theory, as the excess produced by them. By 'male' I mean to refer to a difference which is tantamount to biological in the deployment of textuality, power and so forth. For this reason I have not adopted the conventional use of masculine/feminine to refer to constructed gender difference. 'Male' reading theory is determinist through and through since it is predicated upon the single restrictive production of theory by and through the male position. As the argument will go on to argue, this allows a feminized subject position, but that is not the same thing as a female position.

<sup>77</sup> This begs the question of what 'feminine subjectivity' might be, how it is described and experienced. I will leave these more vexing questions suspended since the present discussion's use of the term seems contextually unambiguous.

possible. She is not bothered by the textuality of the text, its warp and weft, as Miss Loyer, a character in Eliza Haywood's *The Invisible Spy* makes clear, complaining against digressions and so forth, urging that all such interruptions to the narrative be printed in a different kind of type to facilitate her skipping them more easily.<sup>78</sup>

This rapid consumption of the text coupled with the intense desire to remain at the level of the process, in the flow of the narrative, I take as one of the most prevalent and persistent 'male' descriptions of a purported woman's experience of female subjectivity. An analogue or symptom of that uniquely female experience of self is clearly there on the page for her, represented by and in the romantic heroines she weeps over, or whatever. But such representation has far less force than the experience of reading itself: the woman is less interested in being taken by the characters on the page than in being seduced and ravished by her very reading of the text. Again, in reference to the reading of novels More warns against this, but in so doing she makes the point for us:

... however unexceptionable they may be sometimes found in point of expression, however free from evil in its more gross and palpable shapes, yet from their very nature and constitution they excite a spirit of relaxation, by exhibiting scenes and suggesting ideas which soften the mind and set the fancy at work; they take off restraint, diminish the sober-mindedness, impair the general powers of resistance, and at best feed habits of improper indulgence, and nourish a vain and visionary indolence, which lays the mind open to error and the heart to seduction.<sup>79</sup>

The woman, according to this description, finds her own experience of self is generated precisely by this working of the fancy;<sup>80</sup> an oppositional defence

<sup>78</sup> Eliza Haywood, *The Invisible Spy*, 2 vols (London, 1750), III, p. 267. See also William Jackson *Thirty Letters on various Subjects* 3rd edn (London, 1795), p. 16: 'A novel, whose merit lies chiefly in the story should be quickly passed through; for the closer you can bring the several circumstances together the better.' This form of reading was in fact very common, as the marked-up passages in novels demonstrate. We should pause to note here the employment of stereotypical gender divisions: men read hard books, read for the plot, women read as flow, process; men are, women continually become, and so forth. These tropes of western conceptualizations of gender difference are extremely resistant to defiguration. I do not mean to uphold them, but to point out their underlying figurative power in the history we are tracing.

<sup>79</sup> More, *Structures*, I, p. 185.

<sup>80</sup> See De Quincy on this: 'Novel readers are obeying a higher and more philosophic impulse than they are aware of. They seek an imaginary world where the harsh hindrances, which in the real one too often fret and disturb 'the course of true love', may be forced to bend to the claims of justice and the pleadings of the heart... They demand at the hands of the novelist a final event corresponding to the natural award of celestial wisdom and benignity. What they are striving after, in short, is to realise an ideal: and to reproduce the world under more harmonious arrangements. This is the secret craving of the reader; and novels are shaped to meet it.' 'On Novels, written in a Lady's Album', in *The Uncollected Writings of Thomas De Quincy*, ed. James Hogg, 2 vols (New York, rpt 1972), I, p. 356.

against the restraint she finds everywhere present in the codes of social behaviour.

If this is an accurate description of an alternative 'women's reading scene' then all of the distinctions we have made about the use of texts and their legislation by reading theory can be sketched in a rather different way. Women were notorious for leaving their mark upon the texts they had read: complaints about the perfumed books from the subscription library, for example, were common, as were the remarks about the traces of powder in the spines of books which had been read while at the hands of the *frisur*.<sup>81</sup> Just as noticeable were the fingerprints or scratches from nails on the pages at relevant points in the text. Here the relation to the printed page is remarkably different from that described in the section on the textual face: there is no reverence for the text, still less a text-fear as the marks and marginalia bear witness to. Such marginalia were even commented upon by later readers of the same book, so that the production of further textual material is quite explicitly present in the women's reading scene. Where the (male) reader was instructed by reading theory to give himself up to the page, to imitate as closely as possible the author, the woman reader in her practice makes every effort to make herself present to the text, within the text. In this way textuality and the experience of self are fused together, the one being read off the text and the other reflecting the subject. Textuality and sexuality, in this restricted sense, coincide in the women's reading scene, a state of affairs that More, for example, warns against.

Women, she counsels, should read books which exercise 'the reasoning faculties' and 'teach the mind to get acquainted with its own nature, and to stir up its own powers'.<sup>82</sup> In doing this the female mind is activated, it comes to an awareness of its independent power. However, in the extension of this analysis More reveals that the purpose of this strengthening and invigorating exercise is to remove women from the social, to lift them out of the arena of human relations entirely:

Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect; it abstracts her from the world and its vanities; it fixes a wandering spirit, and fortifies a weak one; it divorces her from matter; it corrects that spirit of trifling which she naturally contracts from the frivolous turn of female conversation, and the petty nature of female employments; it concentrates her attention, assists her in a habit of excluding trivial thoughts, and thus even helps to qualify her for religious pursuits. [I. 184-5]

It seems to me that More is exactly mirroring the exclusion of women from the public male reading scene; although she may be advocating that women refrain from novel reading, in fact in doing so she is recognizing that a place for women

<sup>81</sup> See above *Lady's Magazine*, XX (April, 1789), p. 177.

<sup>82</sup> More, *Structures*, I, p. 183.

has been constructed by reading theory: the private, silent insertion within the text. Again, although More is advocating that women pursue 'serious study' in order to improve their minds she grounds her advice in the knowledge that the distinctive *women's* experience is characterized by 'frivolous' and 'trifling' social pursuits, among which are numbered the reading of novels. My point here is that More, among others, locates a particular set of social activities which are taken to be uniquely feminine – nothing remarkable about that – among which are numbered the consumption/production of texts. It is the uniquely feminine form of that consumption/production that allows us to sketch the possibility of a woman's scene of reading, a place generated within and by reading theory which specifically genders the activity.<sup>85</sup>

As we have seen above, More cautions that if women indulge in 'soft' reading they will lose their grip on the hard male forms of social decorum; they 'take off restraint' and 'impair the general powers of resistance'. But what is it that women should be resisting, what are they exercising such restraint over? More's text suggests 'improper indulgence' and 'vain and visionary indolence' but the fear behind these veiled comments is that women will be seduced into an experience of their own subject position, into the 'visionary', the fantasy world of the novel where there is no 'restraint'. Such experience is, of course, frowned upon by More since it has no corrective legislating discourse: in this sense women's subjectivity is beyond reason, beyond morality, outside the law. Taken from this perspective, reading theory, as one of the legislative discourses which control the reading activity, fails to correct the women's reading scene: having cast out the aberration it relinquishes its power to control it. So it is that women's subjectivity, sense of self comes to be represented by and located in the indiscriminate indulgence in fantasy, in the textual/sexual suturing of the private interior of consciousness with the public novelistic expression of desire. Yet one might sense that the lady doth protest rather too much in all this: while the excess of reading theory can be described in the terms we have been using above, another perspective is possible, from which this strenuous legislative activity takes on another shape. For, while More seems to counsel as vociferously as possible against the reading of 'licentious' novels, a position

<sup>85</sup> I do not wish to suggest that this place is where women may have then (or even now) experienced 'female subjectivity' since the gender specification may merely serve to fortify the 'male' position of theory. We should note here that this gendered position is itself produced by, within the theoretical. This is a difficult problem to sort out since the 'feminized' position is clearly a less powerful gender specification than the 'female'. Without wishing to know how this might be solved, avoided or erased it is nevertheless possible to do as I hope to do here: force reading theory to articulate its construction of the space, to recognize that place as a possibility, and merely to record that it may be taken as a gift of women, in its own terms, or, equally, as the final form of their repression and subjectivity.

which can be construed in the above terms, when male theorists also take the same tack it begins to look as if something else is being articulated, something else is at stake. Thus, while the position outlined above may seem a coherent one, in which the excess, or overlap, of reading theory has been identified as the women's place, the site of a feminized subjectivity, there is a further position left to be examined, described most easily as a deflection or 'fake' by which reading theory claims one thing in order to disguise another more telling truth about the practice it uncovers and polices. This more subversive interpretation arises when one looks at the massive technology marshalled against women reading novels, and when one begins to question the overwhelming domination of one particular description of the reading activity. It may now appear that it is not *women* who seem to have been caught within the prevailing male ideologies which determined their behaviour, or *women* who were uniquely oppressed by male-dominated forms of representation, but that *men* were also forced into a self-image created by theory's genderization of the practice it fantasizes.

This becomes apparent when one considers the possibility that all this enormous weight of effort against the reading of novels by women may have been a screen to hide the fact that men were the most prolific consumers of illicit texts, and that the division of gender in the reading activity was less to oppress women than to maintain the fiction of the purity of a certain male ethic.<sup>84</sup> The presence of such an overwhelming body of literature on the women's reading scene, on women's obsessive consumption of novels, should, perhaps, be taken as an indication of the large numbers of men who indulged in this pastime.<sup>85</sup> Thus, reading not too strongly between the lines of the following description of the novel-reading habit it becomes clear that the obsessive description of the women's scene may be hiding another reality:

<sup>84</sup> Thus, while the *Lady's Magazine*, X (April, 1789), cited above p. 256 states that women read illicit texts while having their hair dressed, Knox, in his Essay 156 makes it clear that *men* also read while in the hands of the *frisieur*: 'The fine lady and gentleman who have nothing to do but to pursue their amusement, and in whose delicate minds the dressing of the hair is a business of the first importance, commonly spend two or three hours every day under the hand of the *frisieur*; but then the time is by no means wasted, for it is spent in summer reading; and as the volumes which contain summer reading are not large folios, and neither printed in the smallest type, nor on the most crowded page, one of them just serves to fill up the hours devoted to the artist of the comb. The gentle student rises from his chair when the operation is completed, takes off his flannel gown, sends back the half-bound book to the library, and enters upon the momentous business without any odious gravity or seriousness, which might perhaps have remained with him, had his morning studies required deep thought, or communicated to him a series of sober reflections.'

<sup>85</sup> The point made by Paul Kaufman, and referred to above.

The generality of gay, sprightly females are fond of reading novels; and some parents indulge them in it, under an idea, that it is innocent, and gives them a knowledge of the world; but let them beware of such books, without a proper discrimination. Of all reading, that of novels is the most futile, and frequently the most pernicious. Many of them suggest false notions of life, inflame the imagination, and vitiate the heart. A lady whose mind is not engaged in more useful, or capable of more rational, employment, sends her servant to the Circulating Library; and he returns loaded with volumes, containing pathetic tales of love and madness, the sorrows of a disappointed innamorato, or the adventures of a debauchee: which fill her head with ridiculous chimeras, with romantic schemes of gallantry, with an admiration of young rakes of spirit: with dreams of conquests, amorous interviews, and matrimonial excursions: with a detestation of all prudential advice, impatience or control, love of imaginary liberty, and an abjuration of all parental authority. In many of our novels, such infatigating and inflammatory notions are excited, such scenes of villainy and vice laid open, as should never be communicated to the female mind. The criminal projects of a romantic hero are usually placed in the most agreeable light. His arts of seduction, his flattery, his insinuating address, his personal accomplishments, his gallantry and gaiety, and his enterprising spirit, are set off to the highest advantage. By these means, vice gradually becomes familiar, and no longer excites that horror and detestation, which it ought to create.<sup>86</sup>

All the usual movement of argument is here, from the ethical to the medical, and while the primary object may be to save womanhood from itself, which is the same thing as saving it for men, of course, a secondary purpose troubles the surface of its rhetoric. It is not merely that Robertson seems to insist too much on the implied delicacy of the female mind, and hence on its being unfit for the scenes of 'vice and villany', but that there emerges from behind his cautionary directives an all too easily detected enthusiasm for such scenes. Indeed, the question which comes uppermost to mind is 'how does Robertson know what is in these pathetic tales of love and madness?'<sup>87</sup>

Seen in this light Fordyce's almost rabid denunciation of novels takes on another, more curious, sheen:

What shall we say of certain Books which we are assured (for we have not read them) are in their Nature so shameful, and their tendency so pestiferous, and contain such rank

<sup>86</sup> Robertson, *An Essay on the education of young ladies*, pp. 42–4.

<sup>87</sup> A similar question might be phrased to Francis Foster, the author of the following remarks:

'To prepare her for the Dangers she must encounter, she should be well acquainted with the Spectators – Fordyce's Discourses to young Women – Dr Gregory's Advice to his Daughters – Mrs Chapone's letters on the Improvement of the Mind – Guardians – Ramblers – Adventurers – etc. . . A Novel should never enter the Doors, (except Lady Julia Mandeville, and Fielding's Works) for they give wrong Turns of Thinking...lead young Minds to form absurd Ideas of Characters...to expect to meet with those, which do not exist – and to act romantically, in order to Copy the Painting that is drawn out of Nature – and which abounds in every Novel I ever read, except the above, and perhaps one or two others, that I may forget.' *Thoughts on the Times*, pp. 41–3.

Treason against the royalty of Virtue, such horrible violations of all Decorum, that she who can bear to pursue them, must in her Soul be a Prostitute, let her Reputation in Life be what it will . . . Nor do we condemn those writings only, that with an effrontery, which defies the Laws of God and Men, carry on their Forehead the Mark of the Beast. We consider the general run of Novels as utterly unfit for you. Instruction they convey none. They paint Scenes of Pleasure and Passion altogether improper for you to behold, even with the Mind's Eye. Their Descriptions are often loose and lascivious in a High Degree; their representations of Love between the Sexes are almost universally overstrained. All is dotage or despair; or else ranting swelled into Burlesque. In short, the Majority of their Lovers are either mere Lunatics or Mock-heroes.<sup>88</sup>

It is in the force of comments such as 'utterly unfit for you', or 'altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind's Eye' that one detects a smokescreen: this raving attack on the women's reading scene, must, one suspects, be hiding the fact that men not only read and enjoyed these illicit texts, but that, at some level and in some fashion, they felt it of the utmost consequence that such textual forms remained the privileged, if illicit, and therefore often voraciously to be denied, territory of male reading.

One also suspects that the pleasures of the text being covered up here did not sit happily within the predominant male social persona, and that the sexual excitement aroused by these 'luscious descriptions' may have been not only the result of common voyeuristic heterosexual curiosity but also a more problematic and undisclosed homosexual fascination. While it would be wrong to assume that sexuality for the eighteenth century was constituted by the same relations of power and representation that characterize our own discourse of sexuality, still more foolish to imagine a less enlightened set of sexual mores articulating the eighteenth-century situation than our own, it is nevertheless important to note that a certain crisis did arise concerning the value of gender terms. Thus, the common complaint we have already seen in relation to the voice, over its fall from manliness into effeminacy, may not have specifically resulted from concern over the sexual preferences of individuals but it did, nevertheless, arise on account of a sense of the growing depravity of the times.<sup>89</sup> James Fordyce addresses this issue in the following:

He that, in times like these, when a masculine virtue and deportment are become so fashionable, attempts to recommend them, may lay his account with being deemed by the

<sup>88</sup> This is cited in *The female miscellany*, pp. 98–100, and is an extract from James Fordyce, *Sermons to young women*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (London, 1766).

<sup>89</sup> My point here is not about the use of the term 'effeminate', or about the referents of various gender-distinguished terms. These matters are extremely complex and cannot be easily summed up here: I wish merely to underline that the issue was seen in terms of the degeneracy of sexual mores, no matter how those mores were arranged. For a collection of essays on the topic of the sexual during the period see Paul-Cabriel Boucé, *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, 1982).

greater part sufficiently awkward, or at least romantic, in his notions. Even of the few, whose minds and manners are not yet enervated by the surrounding contagion, some will probably apprehend that he takes the subject on too high a key. They are willing, for their own share, to be as good and wise as they can in private, and perhaps secretly to cultivate the seeds of internal greatness: but to avow these dispositions openly, in the present state of the world, they would consider as the certain way to draw upon themselves a ridicule, which they are not so well prepared to sustain. The truth is, that the sentiments of an undaunted and uncompromising probity are now-a-days regarded by the many as mere theatrical rant, or, fictitious heroism to be found only in books, and imagination of here and there an idle visionary, dreaming in his closet, and wholly ignorant of life and nature.<sup>90</sup>

As one can see from these remarks, the reasons for protecting the force and power of fiction take on immense importance. What is at stake is not only the protection of a literary culture, and the continuation of its present guardians, but also the moral fabric of the nation and the ethical probity of the individual. It is of crucial importance, furthermore, that gender determines the respective roles of the individual in this scenario, and that women be assigned the position of virtuous mother figures who are kept pure in their virtue because of their exclusion from participating to the full and in all types of textuality:

But it will be granted by every intelligent and considerable person that . . . the utmost caution should be observed relative to the kinds of texts which are put into the hands of females. That Religion and Virtue ought to form the ruling temper of the mind of females, and be the governing principle of their conduct, will not be contested even by professed infidels. Whatever may be thought of the position, it will yet be found more than a speculative idea, that on the virtue of women, in a great measure, depends the security of the state.

Were infidelity and licentiousness to be prevalent among women, all would be corruption and disorder. Men are very often restrained within the limits of morality, or at least of a decent appearance, from their attachment to virtuous women; and it cannot be denied, that the infant mind receives its first moral tinge and virtuous bias from the watchful care and instructions of maternal affection. Let women then once be supposed to regard Religion and Virtue as empty names, and the whole state of society would of course be contaminated.<sup>91</sup>

These remarks take us further from the argument to hand, but they do demonstrate the complexity of the position taken by reading theorists. This is hardly surprising, given that these theories are contextualized by, written within, the knot of discourses surrounding the subject. Therefore, to come down on one side of this divide against the other – to claim that the excess

<sup>90</sup> James Fordyce, *Addresses to Young Men*, 2 vols (Dublin 1777), II, pp. 111–12.

<sup>91</sup> Joshua Collins, *A Practical Guide to Parents and Guardians in the right choice and use of books*, (London, 1802), p. 29.

produced by reading theory can *only* be seen in terms of the women's reading scene – is to limit the full play of this legislative discourse. It is also to ignore the fact that such discourses are always a matter of contestation, open to appropriation, and the agents of a certain kind of domination.

However, some general remarks may be made in conclusion concerning this excess since there is a common point of contact between these two versions of the 'illicit' scene of reading. This point of contact is produced by the relation that theory has to practice, for, whether it is the women's place or the male illicit indulgence which arises from reading theory, both are disturbing in relation to the legislative capacity of theory. What is here being suggested is that reading theory produces its own resistance to itself; that it sets itself up as the legislating discourse for a practice, but in so doing denies the possibility of legislating itself – hence the emission or unwanted production of either the women's reading scene, or male illicit pleasure. The full importance of such a resistance to theory is brought out when we consider the implications of the following description of a woman reading from Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary*:

As she was sometimes obliged to be alone, or only with her French waiting-maid, she sent to the metropolis for all the new publications, and while she was dressing her hair, and she could turn her eyes from the glass, she ran over those most delightful substitutes for bodily dissipation, novels.<sup>92</sup>

Textuality and sexuality coincide for this model woman reader, thereby demonstrating the fear and obsession of eighteenth-century reading theory. The woman does not bring the text into speech, she does not parade her subject in front of an admiring audience, as if the audience constituted the mirror within which identity was reflected, nor does she 'master' the text lying supine in front of her and awaiting her penetrating gaze. Rather, the woman glances from self-image, the reflection in the mirror, to text, from the real to the imaginary in a suturing of her fantasy and identity:

When the female attains the age of seventeen or eighteen, and who is not born to the possession of an ample fortune, but destined to move in a moderate sphere; when her looking-glass and her partner at the assembly have told her that she is a beauty; and when the fairy tales have lost their zest, the novel is at hand. The fair student sees her own picture in the charming and sorrowful heroine; and very naturally tries, as far as it is in her power, to imitate what she admires.<sup>93</sup>

The woman experiences herself as woman in this textual healing: the slippage between her image in the glass and the image she projects of herself into the text enables her to read for her own subjectivity, as the recognition of her own

<sup>92</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary* (Oxford, 1980), p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Rev. Edward Mangin, *An Essay on Light Reading*, p. 13–14.

sexuality.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the 'woman's reading scene' is constituted as outside theory's legislative domain, outside the law and the ruling norms of social intercourse, and this applies as much to men as to women:

Men therefore in general have recourse to books both for instruction and entertainment. This sort of entertainment is in its own nature a selfish one, as the exercise is performed alone, and the reader has no one to participate of his satisfaction. Nor is there a greater enemy to facility of utterance, than a habit of silent reading, or which more disqualifies persons from making a figure in conversation.<sup>95</sup>

The give-away sign of the deployment of sexuality in the reading scene is Sheridan's caution that the reader has 'no one to participate of his satisfaction', precisely the absence of the mirror-audience which reflects the male self-image, and which produces the divisions of gender in its 'proper' and proprietorial place. The production of the excess, then, is construed as precisely an aberration, a dysfunction of the social, the sexual, and the theoretical; reading, it is clear, must be kept out in the open, and any 'theory' of reading must take great care to be no more than a mere description of the practice. Accordingly any attempt to move from the public to the private, from the socially constituted subject to the self-produced, must be resisted. This, I would maintain, arises from one of the most keenly felt legacies of the discourse of the sublime: the discursive excess operating across the divide of gender. For, if the discourses constituting sexuality are themselves given to the production of an unlegislable excess, as would appear from the discussion above, then the very possibility of legislative discourse fades away. That this was so keenly felt is demonstrated by the following:

<sup>94</sup> The common assumptions concerning female vanity are connected to this use of the mirror image, and could be termed the other side of the glass. This is made more than apparent in James Fordyce's moral strictures to women which precisely identify the women's reading scene in terms of illicit vanity, and seek to force women to remain within the limits of the text, thereby being bound by textual law: 'On this last particular I am led to observe, that, for a disengaged hour, there can be few occupations of greater entertainment or utility, than that of imprinting on the mind those passages from any good author, which happen to please and affect more than ordinary; either by repeating them often at the time, till they are got by heart, or by writing them down, or sometimes by doing both. The advantages of such a practice are sufficiently apparent. Would it be one of the least, think ye, that the attention of her who was thus employed, would be often turned from viewing and admiring her person or dress in the mirror, to the contemplation of Truth and Virtue, and fixing their fair and Venerable image in her soul?' *Sermons to young women*, I, p. 295.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Sheridan, *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, I, p. 187. Cf. also *The Art of conversing* (London 1777), p. 11: 'Many ladies, and a certain sort of gentleman, are furnished with a variety of ideas from romances, novels, &c. yet are at a loss in rational conversation; perhaps their ideas are not fit to communicate.'

It cannot however be dissembled, that the strongest characteristic of the present age, considered at large, is a predominant love of show, dissipation, and revelry. Where wealth employs genius, dexterity, or diligence, to contrive and heighten innocent amusements, none but the illiberal or the gloomy can be displeas'd: trade and manufactures are promoted; skill is exercised and improv'd; social delight is vari'd and exalt'd: Piety is not offend'd or forgotten; the Virtues and the Graces go hand in hand. But when application, taste, and talents, are prostituted to such as can buy them, for the purpose of devising, without limitation and without end, new modes of pleasures ruinous by their expence, inflammatory to the passions, productive of softness, idleness, sensuality, debauchery; tending to alienate the heart from the company of the wise and worthy, from the duties and joys of domestic life; to indispose it for the sentiments and offices of devotion; to beget a distrelsh for virtuous attachment in those that are not married, to supplant affection in those that are; and thus to undermine the very foundations of private, and consequently of public, happiness; – when this is the case, can you easily conceive a more alarming symptom, or a more fatal perversion?<sup>96</sup>

This is, of course, the ranting of the puritan, the raving of the zealot, but its fears are not the result of some idiosyncratic reaction to the times. Here we find almost a complete catalogue of the discursive knot which has been under discussion throughout this book: morality and money, wealth and health, sexuality and society, pleasure and duty, the public and private. All these things are suddenly brought together in order to illustrate one, and only one terrifying possibility: once a discourse produces an excess, once it begins to produce to excess, 'without limitation and without end', there is no turning back. In terms of reading practice it is the turn from the public to the private that threatens the stability of discourse, its observance of the law. In gender terms it suggests that the man, as much as the woman, should fear the interior self-reflection of consciousness, and should make every effort to remain within the real, in the world.

The woman, for her part, recognizes her exclusion from the world, but as her eyes move within the interior of the text she also recognizes her inclusion within textuality. Such a dysfunction of the reality principle may result in madness, as nineteenth-century physicians construed it, but it may also rearrange the relations between text and world, so that the fantasy on the page may slowly seep into the real. One might see the history of nineteenth-century fiction in precisely these terms: as the revision of certain ideological tenets about the place of women rather than the mere reflection of their actual, or fantasy construction of their desired, social and sexual relations.

In conclusion, then, we should note that reading theory claims for the man the aurial reality of the public reading scene, whereas it attempts to inhibit the silent perusal of texts, construing such activity as outside the law. In making this distinction the valuation of the voice, and the corresponding restraint of the text leads reading theory to a construction of female subjectivity in spite of itself.

<sup>96</sup> Fordyce, *Addresses to Young Men*, I, pp. 115–6.



That subject position is, as we have seen, created by the dysfunction of the reading activity, in the text and not the voice. Thus, the text-fear we have indicated as one result of the valuation of voice also enables another kind of textual use, that represented by women novel readers, though not necessarily only performed by them. Hence a kind of textual commodification results, in which the text is both an object for the performance of male sexuality and the repository of female subjectivity. If, as we have seen, the reader and author may also both be figured as texts then this textual commodification takes on considerable significance in relation to the economy of social relations, the proprietorship of the subject, and the construction of sexual difference: precisely the knot of discourses with which we began this chapter.

Such a commodification of the text,<sup>97</sup> in which the man may purchase the pretext for his identity and the woman the means of pretence for hers, splits the consumption and production of texts into two forms of use. I have attempted to sketch that textual production and consumption during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth in terms of the text-fear articulated by reading theory; but the concomitant textual commodification and differing values attached to use may just as well expose something more telling about the writing and reading of theory, both for the eighteenth century and for us.

It is this relationship between a legislating theory and its object practice which has been the implicit subject of Part II of this book. In the third and final part the wider implications of this will be examined within the initial framework of the larger argument of the book.

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### PART III

<sup>97</sup> The connections between writing and sexuality have recently been treated in relation to eighteenth-century literature by Terry Eagleton, see *The Rape of Clarissa* (Oxford, 1982). However, I mean to allude to the more practical instances of the full complexity of the knot surrounding reading and writing, such as Wordsworth's physical disability in using a writing instrument, of Mary Shelley's reading and writing on her mother's grave, or Hazlitt's tactile and olfactory obsession with old texts.

# 11

## Of the Sublime

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Two men are sitting in a room in London some time in March 1808, one is suffering from a recurrent illness and extreme fatigue, the other has come to visit his friend, to lighten his spirits and indulge in frantic intense conversation. The sick man has been giving a series of lectures – his first – in London that spring, which has been interrupted by his illness. Talk ranges over the topic of the lectures, and includes at some stage a discussion of the sublime. The sick man has been reading Richard Payne Knight's *An analytical inquiry into the principles of taste* and asks his friend to make some marginal annotations to his copy of the book. The friend, who rarely if ever writes, and certainly almost never makes marginal annotations to books, takes up a pen and acts as amanuensis for the sick man. These two men are Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, and this scene, with which the present book began, will serve as the location for our concluding speculations.

The intriguing origins of the marginalia to Knight's book were brought to general attention by Edna Aston Shearer in the *Huntington Library Quarterly* in 1937. Something of a mystery surrounds the annotations in the book since the earlier article of 1931 in the *Huntington Library Bulletin* by Edwin Berck Dike claimed that the marginalia were Coleridge's, whereas Shearer's investigations of the handwriting suggest the hand was Wordsworth's. As she points out, it would have been almost unprecedented had Wordsworth himself taken Coleridge's copy of the book and written in its margins considering his lifelong practice in relation to marginal annotation and extreme dislike of the physical act of writing. In an appendix to Shearer's article by Julia Ira Lindsay it is suggested that Coleridge in fact dictated the comments to Wordsworth, who, we must presume, painfully wrote them into the text. As Lindsay points out, this is something of a unique document, a patchwork of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's thoughts occasioned by the topic of the sublime layered over one of the terminal works on the eighteenth-century sublime, a work which, as we shall see, takes up some of the points raised fifty-one years previously by Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry*.

This intertextual stroke of luck provides us with an excellent map for recharting the movement of eighteenth-century aesthetics, and for formulating some concluding remarks on the discourse of the sublime. These remarks will proceed from our initial chronological description of eighteenth-century aesthetics which registered that Burke's sublime is not Knight's which is not Coleridge's. Recapitulating economically: this study began with an account of the discourse on the sublime as it arises during a very restricted historical period, such a discourse having been isolated by sketching a chronology of enquiries into the topic of aesthetics during the century. This enabled us to note that the notion of the sublime and of the discourses on it changes from 1757 to 1805, the respective dates of publication for Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* and Knight's *Analytical Inquiry*. It should be clear by now how I regard the necessity of attenuating this chronological model, and how the notion of sudden change, or break, or rupture is insensitive to what I understand as a discursive history of these changes. Nevertheless, I propose to begin once again by reading through this oversimplified chronological model 'Coleridge's comments on Knight on Burke.

The two marginal comments of substance to be found in the Huntington library copy of the *Analytical Inquiry* are both concerned with the topic of tragedy and representation. The first is inserted in pp. 319–20 of Knight's text at the point at which Knight discusses the section of Burke's essay 'Of the effects of Tragedy'. Burke, we may remind ourselves, claims that stage representations, no matter how 'real' they aspire to be, how advanced the technology of their presentation, are always inferior to 'real' events. The example he gives is instructive:

But then I imagine we shall be much mistaken if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to a consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the further it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power. [*Enquiry*, p. 47]

Knight quotes this last sentence in approval, and it is at this point that the marginal annotation appears, here given in full:

This is wretched trifling on the part of Burke whose book on the sublime is little better than a tissue of trifles. The instance adduced to illustrate his position has no tendency so to do. Supposing that it were possible to represent a tragedy in such a manner that the delusion during the representation would be perfect, then suppose when it is proposed to repeat this tragedy that at the same time an event resembling it in its main outline, or at least the catastrophe of such an event is to be exhibited in the public execution of some King, princess or other eminent person. We are then to ask to which spectacle the people would repair. But there is in the essentials of the case no similitude; for whatever may be our sensations when the attention is recalled to a scenic representation how farsoever we may then lose sight of its being a mimic show, we know perfectly at the time, when we are going to see it, or when assembled at the Theatre in expectation: that it is nothing better or worse. It is possible, that the mind during the representation of a tragedy may have fits of

forgetfulness and deception and believe the fiction to be the reality, but the moment you suppose it in a condition to make a choice of this kind, all sense of such delusion vanishes. Therefore however perfect according to Burke's notion of perfection a tragedy may be unless you suppose the delusion indestructible the cases can admit of no comparison, nor if you do can they admit of any for then they are identical, both becoming realities. But these absurdities are too gross for notice.<sup>1</sup>

The first problem with Burke's example, according to the romantic hand, is that the two examples are non-concurrent, they do not submit to comparison. A point needs to be raised here about the nature of similarity or difference, and whether it is possible to compare like things. If it is, such comparison might be called 'intercomparison' and would investigate the ways in which something can be understood as like itself. This is a complex area of speculation which need not arrest the discussion unduly: it is enough to remark the similarity between the problem addressed by the romantic hand and our own attempt to compare Payne Knight, Burke and 'Coleridge'.

We might also note that the annotation is, in its general tenor of remark, directed at what Coleridge elsewhere terms 'the suspension of disbelief', and thereby at the most global problematics of representation. A possible gloss to these comments might note that for the romantic the subject is always present to itself as it witnesses the dramatic scene; it is always distanced by and in the 'real' of the dramatic representation. In a limited sense, then, the self recognizes itself as like itself. The romantic, we may infer from this, takes subjectivity to representation. For Burke this is not quite the case: the subject witnesses the representation in the theatre on the same grounds and in the same manner as the event in the 'real'. The one may be taken as a fictitious representation, but its *presentation* constructs the subject in precisely the same way in both situations: the subject feels itself through sympathy with the events presented, be they fictional or real, in the theatre or in the public square. The point being made by the romantic is that there is a qualitative difference between a representation in a theatre and one in the real: in the former the self can never be deluded into a permanent suspension of disbelief because the subject exists *outside* the space given it, constructed for it, by dramatic representation. It both knows this to be the case and experiences it as such on account of the fact that it can make judgments about the nature of the (re)presentation. In this way the subject knows both itself, and knows and feels the subject effect positioned by the drama. The romantic, therefore, claims that the Burkean example is a false one: the subject in the theatre suspends its self-knowledge, that which it tells itself as/of subjectivity. This is what it recognizes as the theatrical experience, as the frame

<sup>1</sup> Edna Aston Shearer, 'Wordsworth and Coleridge Marginalia in a Copy of Richard Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1, (Oct. 1937), pp. 63–94; p. 77.

which can never be entirely erased. The subject 'in the real' operates under very different conditions and is fully inserted within the representation/presentation of reality: that is how it knows itself to be a subject. If these two kinds of presentation, the 'real' and the fictitious drama, were in fact capable of being compared one would merely be comparing like things, merely claiming that a hanging is like a hanging since the theatrical portrayal would, to all intents and purposes, be precisely equivalent to the reality. This would be to give to the theatrical (re)presentation precisely the same kind of self-identity the self arrogates to itself.

Burke does not argue the case in this way at all so it is useful to recall his own example, that which occasions both Knight's comment and the marginal annotation. Burke writes:

Chuse a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square: in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy. [47]

The alteration in the romantic text from 'state criminal of high rank' to 'some King, princess or other eminent person' is immediately striking. The execution of the King, of course, has rather different connotations and implications within the theatre of the real from that of a person of high rank. As Boulton, the editor of the Burke text points out, the reference is probably to the execution of Lord Lovat (9 April 1747): the romantic text, however, works its critique through irony and bathos, 'some King . . .' in such a manner as to elide a substantial point about the politics of representation. This becomes visible when we note that the execution of the King, in English history, brings in to representation something which had until that point in time been located within the realm of the unrepresentable. It hardly needs emphasizing that the implications of that act were irrevocably contaminated by questions of political power and political representation. To rush from the theatre to the execution of a Lord is to witness the *frisson* of scandal: it is to participate in a social space in which the community of subjects witness their exclusion from the aristocracy and demonstrate their fascination by it. It is to collectively state person against property, individual against institution and class. To rush from no matter how sublime a tragedy to witness the execution of the King is to be present at, to be represented within, the scene in which collective power speaks for person as it overmasters the powers of the state and king. It is to state collectivity against person, and, as such, it participates in a reordering of representation, in the dismembering of the orders of discourse.

Furthermore, the scene described by Burke has another register, signalled by the 'erection of expectation', pertaining to what was well known and recognized

during the period as a feature of public hangings: the production and experience of aberrant sexual sensation.<sup>2</sup> This is to say that Burke's example underlines social, political and sexual constructions of person, of self. The individual is created in the spaces of representation opened up for it in the real. For the romantic the political force of the execution of the King, its implications and the questions aroused by it have, to some extent, been erased or forgotten. The romantic uses this example without reflection, without pause, since the illustration serves the purpose of registering the difference and distance between two separate orders of the discourse of the subject. In this romantic description the subject inhabits a more fractured, yet more homogeneous ordering of the discursive and it can do this because person or self is constructed outside the spaces of representation opened up by and for the subject effect in the discourses of the real. That fractured order can be seen as the reflection of a dominant ideology of self, of person, of the individual as human agent, and a refraction of the corresponding paradoxical homogeneity of the subject position, the discursive effect of the subject which reduces difference to common experience, similarity. Art, or more narrowly the drama in the example above, presents for the romantic one of the very few spaces of and for representation in which the subject may lose its sense of self and give up its self-centred construction of identity to the process of the play. It does this by telling itself the fiction of the willing suspension of disbelief.

We are caught up here in the complexities of the topology of similarity and difference, but not, I hope, inextricably. Once again the invocation of the chronological frame will help: difference, for the romantic, is that which sanctions individuality, the sign which tells back to the self its sense of self. We might say that the reflective surface which images the self for the later writer is internalized within the subject as that which is not self-identical: difference. For the earlier theorist difference represents the division of society and, therefore, the division of the self: here the reflective surface, as we have seen throughout the second part of this book, is external, public, within the social, cultural and political. For Burke the heterogeneous experiences of the real indicate a number of differences which must be brought to similarity, which must be homogenized into a unitary subject through comparison and combination, whereas the romantic takes the flux of the real as indicating the identity of the subject with itself, not with the positionings produced in and by the discourses of the real. Similarly, the comparison of like things, reduces the subject to an effect of the real for the romantic, whereas it legitimates the sense of self and other for the Burkean. This is to compare in an extremely rigid fashion, and to enforce the chronological mapping with which we began: it is to impose the

<sup>2</sup> The case of George Selwyn is the best documented in which the sexual excitement aroused by the sight of execution is treated in detail.

division of difference upon these two historically distanced commentaries interanimated by the subject's insertion or reflection in representation.

The second set of questions raised by the marginal note concerns the more general problems of the distinction between fiction and reality. These questions are elaborated upon in the longest annotation which also includes the greatest number of hesitations, signalled by crossings-out in the text (marked as <->), pointing, perhaps, to the scene having been one of dictation as outlined by Lindsay. The annotations are on pp. 331-4, and occur at the point where Knight discusses the notion that a drama presents action which is not real, but which nevertheless arouses the same sympathy in the audience as gestural and tonal expressions of real feelings in *the real*. The romantic hand begins:

This is rashly asserted. The most extravagant Arabian Tale that was ever formed if it be consistent with itself and does not violate our moral feeling, subdues the mind to a passing belief that the events related really happened. In reading Hamlet or Lear, though we are frequently sensible that the story is fictitious, yet in other moments we do not less doubt of the things having taken place than when we read in History about Pompey or Julius Caesar, we question the truth of the general story. Yet in Lear and Hamlet we have the <almost> arealizing accompaniment of Metre. Nevertheless we believe: Our situation at a Theatre is undoubtedly very different, and the question before me now is to determine whether (as there can be no doubt that we have various degrees of continuous belief in the truth of fictitious stories in verse) whether by the helps which representation supplies the delusion can be carried still further, and we may be made to believe even for a moment that the scene before us is not the representation of a transaction, but the transaction itself is not a shadow of a reflection but a substance. [79-80]

It is helpful to note that the major difference outlined here, between reading the dramatic text and seeing it, immediately takes us back to the issues discussed at length in Part II of this book. The reading of a text in the above instance is clearly determined by prior divisions of experience into interior and exterior: reading alone highlights the fictional character of the text. Seeing the drama in the theatre, on the other hand, is an exterior experience, a part of the subject's 'real'; it is, therefore, a realization of the text even if the performance is of a fictional text. Both instances articulate an economy of the subject divided across the bar of internalization. The fiction that the self tells to itself, that it is a subject, is the interior experience above all others. The public exterior experience of self for the romantic may be interwoven with an interior experience, may operate across the bar of internalization, or may not. If the latter is the case then the subject forgets itself, which in Coleridge's terminology is equivalent to the subject telling itself the fiction of the willing suspension of disbelief.

This is markedly distinct from the conceptual framework articulated in Burke's treatise which is to a large extent determined by a figurative of the subject constructed upon the notion of sympathy. This is brought out in Burke's comments upon privation, which we will turn to at the end of our discussion of the marginalia. We might pause here to reflect on another set of mirrored

images put in play by the mention of the Arabian tale, for the immediate connotation here, given the context, must be Wordsworth's dream of the Arab in *The Prelude*, Book V, itself a reworking of a dream had by Descartes and probably told to Wordsworth by Coleridge.<sup>3</sup> These shadowy intertextualizations are certainly complex and indirect, but if we recall the section of *The Prelude* and bring to mind its own figurations of the relationship between the book and the world, the book and the voices it speaks in foreign tongues, we approach a palimpsest of figuration which effects the transformation of the trope of fiction/reality productive in Burke's text, through its reinforcement into a figure of art/reality in Knight's and into a trope imagination/reality in the romantic text. We may note in respect to this transformation that the dream of the Arab takes place in an imaginative space ordered neither by the fiction/reality figure, nor even the art/reality figure. Its space of representation is made yet more complex still by its mis(re)citing of another's dream and siting in another text by Cervantes; that is the imaginative space for the romantic, in which the tale the self tells itself is figured by its own power to imagination, and its imaginative figurations of subjectivity. In this hall of mirrors it becomes difficult to ascertain the image from the subject, the reflection from the reflective surface. If I dream another's dream, and that dream is a dream of self, whose self is thereby ratified? We are certainly in deep waters, but the frame being constructed here will prove invaluable in the concluding remarks below.

Let us resume by completing the sequence of thought in the long note appended to p. 33 of Knight's text. The romantic hand has become tied up somewhat by the discussion of the nature of the theatrical experience, arguing essentially for the earlier position, that a representation in the theatre cannot attain the same status as a real event. The reason for this, no matter how convincing the stage representation, is 'that we know the thing to be a <dec> representation, but that we often *feel* it to be a reality' [81]. Here the crucial difference between Burke and his later commentators becomes apparent: the romantic splits the subject into knowing and feeling, whereas Burke does all in his power to keep the two mutually reinforcing. For Burke what we feel is what we know, and we do not know what we know without feeling it. For the romantic knowing and feeling constitute two separate modes of experience, two orders of knowledge, both of them stemming from and reinforcing in their own ways an autonomous subject.

The hesitation in the annotation over the word 'deception' which is unfinished and replaced by 'representation' is also worth comment. If we know the thing to be a deception but feel it to be a reality then we are allowing ourselves to be fooled, to be taken in by the deception. This would be to lose the command of the subject, the control of the self, which, in the given formulation,

<sup>3</sup> See Jane Worthington Smyser, 'Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, LXXI (1956), pp. 269-75.

continues its exertion of power, recognizing the representation as representation but feeling it to be a part of the real.

In the private space of an interior consciousness we can read a fictional text and tell ourselves that it is real; we are less able to do this in the public space of the theatre since the situation most usually demands that our own sense of self take precedence over the representation, that we place interior self over the public construction of an exterior self. The romantic's argument with Burke is fundamental on this point, and is illustrated by the first marginal comment made in Knight's text. Burke has once again been summoned up by Knight who this time disagrees with him on the issue of privation causing pain, and therefore by extension the sublime. The romantic hand writes:

There is scarcely a page in his book without a gross error. Thirst *personified* as a power may be tolerated but when thirst is made to scowl a smile, every well disciplined Imagination revolts at the Picture. Thirst considered nakedly as animal sensation has nothing sublime in it nor has Hunger or the sexual appetite, or any other of our animal appetites. But to understand this subject we must ask ourselves, what Powers may the mind receive from the strong domination of one of these appetites, thirst for instance. Suppose a becalmed Mariner, or rather take the instance of [a] tired traveller, in a parched country, upon a sultry day. Let him hear unexpectedly a sound which he imagines to be that of trickling water, while a raging thirst is upon him, then ask what will be the effect of that sound upon his mind while he is yet uncertain whether it gives an assurance of water being within his reach, and after his doubts have passed away. The depth of interest with which he hears this sound which under other circumstances would either have been missed or slightly regarded, is a sublime state of mind. And therefore the sensation of thirst is an efficient cause in the production of the sublime as it calls forth the modifying power of the Imagination. There is an underconsciousness of the sensation of thirst while the mind is affected by a power in the sound never felt but in similar circumstances. [71]

The criticism levelled at Burke via Knight is that the sensation of thirst cannot be personified, and cannot therefore, *of itself* lead to the sublime. It must be attenuated by the powers of the mind, most notably Imagination, in order for it to become 'an efficient cause' of a 'sublime state of mind'. The romantic insistence on the imaginative transformation of the animal appetite should not surprise us; we might however, ponder the detour that is made in order to make this statement. For, the Burkean step of the argument concerns *privation*, which may be both a positive and a negative cause of the sublime. In Burke's treatise the lack of something may not necessarily signal its negative value which, when transferred into the realm of the self, suggests that the absence of self-consciousness may not necessarily be regarded as a fundamental barrier for the production of a sense of self. The subject is both presence and absence, a product of a number of efficient causes. This is to be strenuously distinguished from the romantic conception, which is founded upon a persistence of subjectivity to such an extent that 'under-consciousness' may ground all experience.

All of the above opening comments to this chapter suggest that a narrative of break or rupture might be appropriate for describing the differences between the sublime/subject during the 1750s and the early nineteenth century. They point to very different conceptions of subjectivity based in and upon theories of the sublime. Indeed, we may now venture a few preliminary remarks 'of the sublime', for our concluding example points out extremely well the contested area between the present study and what I take to be a generally disseminated account of eighteenth-century British aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Investigations of the *experience* of the sublime are, as has been noted since Monk's pioneering work, inevitably led to discussions of the subject. To feel extended or enraptured sensations is to be made forcefully aware of one's sense of self. Furthermore, since the crux experiences of the sublime are all concerned with mastery, with limit cases and with excess – these are common features of all the traditionally construed types of the sublime, be they natural, religious or rhetorical – the subject tends to become the prize held out by the familiarization of such experiences. However, as we have seen in the Knight marginalia, it is not the experience, *per se*, which presents difficulty for the theoretical account but the space of representation opened up by and in that experience for the subject; it is the subject's insertion within various accounts of that space which requires elaboration, defence, investigation. The sublime is an order of representation, that is more than clear for Burke as much as for Coleridge, but this only leads to a greater complexity when it is also understood as a disturbance within representations of self. To be within the sublime, to place one's self within its orders of representation, is not by any means to be or accede to the subject. Rather, it is to be placed under the sign of a certain contest between a self as the result or product of the discourses of representation and as the agent active within and upon those discourses. When we speak 'of the sublime', then, we need to be extremely vigilant in regard to its intersemantization of various disfigurements of self. This is one way of describing the tensions between the romantic reading of sublimity and the neo-classic, and points towards the confusions which arise in Kantian appropriations of the eighteenth-century sublime.

Such a large comparison, between clearly differing historical periods and very strongly demarcated orders of discourse, the neo-classical *vs* the romantic, shows up the divide very forcefully. It may be argued, however, that to point to a dif-

<sup>4</sup> These accounts have been footnoted in the first chapter. A further example which points up the problem I am addressing very well can be found in Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the concept of Nature* (London, 1985) pp. 101–14. Modiano conflates Burke, Bailie, Gerard, Knight, Kant, Richter, Herder and Schiller thereby giving the impression that all these writers discuss the same thing, from the same perspective, within the same discourse. This even as she describes differences among these writers. It should by now be more than clear how faulty I regard this intermeshing of the German and English traditions, let alone the conflation of works on aesthetics published in England prior to 1763 with those published after.

ference in conception of subjectivity between Burke and Coleridge is merely to reflect in the most obvious fashion historical chronology: such a conclusion would indeed be trite. It is not the conclusion which interests me in this but the chronology itself, and, in relation to the argument of the second part, the kinds of methodologies enabled and disabled by such a chronology. In common with the various methodological and argumentative strategies used throughout this book I am interested in the uncovering of what is smothered by this perspective; in this sense the initial thought is turned around in order to investigate what is unthought in and by it.

From the comparison mounted in this chapter it seems patently obvious to conclude that the autonomous subject is formulated, comes into being as it were, between Burke and Coleridge, and that the work of the second part of this study has shown how that subject is articulated in a number of fields of enquiry. This has clearly been a part of the argument, yet I have taken pains to demonstrate that the discourse of the sublime, as found partially theorized in Burke and fully in Kames, does not necessarily lead to the autonomous subject found in Coleridge. Rather, I have attempted to demonstrate how the subject arises as a functional effect in works on speaking, viewing and reading, and have stressed the need to resist causal connections between the sublime and the subject-effect, as I term it, in those discourses on reading, speaking and viewing. This has enabled us to note how the subject is positioned, generated by and within a discursive analytic.

This resistance occurs because of the model of discourse utilized throughout the book, a model which does not facilitate a description of the discourse of the sublime as a unitary, coherent form. We cannot conclude that such a discourse determines the functions of other discourses within its range of influence, or even that it determines the distribution of discrete discourses within a particular network. Still less can we claim that it controls or causes the autonomous subject. None of these statements, attractive enough though they are as models for concluding remarks, can be made, because the network of discourses is not stable at any point in time. We have isolated one set of relations within that network, and have pursued the lines of force between those relations in only a very small number of fields of enquiry. Furthermore our own analytical procedures have stabilized the network and allowed us to describe the strands of its knot in one particular way, from one perspective, from the distance of the subject. This distance has enabled us to see how the subject is one set of discursive effects at one time, the period before and during the Seven Years War, and another after it: it has itself ordered the lattice-work of the discursive network. From another distance the network will appear in a different order, perhaps only slightly rearranged, but certainly containing different relationships, exhibiting different features of those discrete discourses which constitute it.

The chronology mounted once again in this chapter which tends towards an

ordering of the past into a before and after, a subject as socially, politically and culturally dispersed against the unitary autonomous subject, is in some sense the repressed or silent narrative throughout this book. In this respect the subject has functioned as a figure or determining trope for the present analysis, it has directed where and how we have looked, and at what we have gazed. It is, therefore, prefigurative of the conclusion that the subject as autonomous agent is the result or the discursive excess of the discourse of the sublime. This is not to claim something which is very often said, that the subject is produced via sublime experience, and that the discourses on the sublime during the eighteenth century are investigations into the ways in which the subject as individual, agent of social and political power, becomes itself through sublime sensation. Rather, my own focus has been on the space of the subject within the discursive; on the subject-effect, the positioning of the subject within discourse. This is to be very strongly distinguished from the subject as agent within the real, the 'real' people who lived in and through the history I have described. This kind of subject, the individual, is taken as a given by most of the current descriptions of the eighteenth-century sublime: my analysis has attempted to demonstrate how the subject position, as a possibility within a discursive analytic, is not present to the works written before and during the Seven Years War, why it arises as a subject for inquiry in them, and how this positionality within discourse is investigated, produced and negated in a set of enquiries more obviously concerned with the human individual, the agent who speaks, views and reads.

Again, to distinguish this study from much of the extant literature about the eighteenth-century sublime we might draw the following distinction: where those works are most often histories of the aesthetic, histories of the sublime as a topic which, it is more than clear, implicates the subject in a number of ways – most notably in respect of transcendence and self-awareness – this study has attempted to generate a historical account of the subject in and of the sublime. Here in conclusion we can essay one further set of remarks about that history by returning to the opening of this chapter and its invocation of the opening of the book.

I hope that the difficulty of producing a narrative account of the sublime which is in some measure sensitive to its internal discursive history has been made clear. One of the ways I have attempted to investigate this difficulty is by constantly moving the frame of analysis across chapters and by articulating three arguments at once. This has led to a very fractured narrative as the resistances to any possible unifying thread have multiplied. The frustration of a controlling or unifying 'theme' or argument has in part been the result of a desire on my own part to investigate the drive towards ending, the incredible power to closure and consistency, coherence and command which characterizes historical narrativity. But such resistance has also become sublimated within the gaze of the book itself, so that in relation to the argument concerned with theory and practice the

chapter on reading, for example, attempts to bring out of reading theory its own resistances, and to make it speak a practice which was only ever *theoretical*. Through this form of explication I have attempted to make theory confront its own imaginary. Taking this as our frame, the discourse of the sublime might now be seen as requiring the autonomous subject, not as producing it: requiring it in order to delay for as long as possible the recognition that the fractured social subject, the subject as event not as continuum, is the 'real' subject posited, by its theory. In other words, the discourse of the sublime produces *in theory* an autonomous unified subject position in order to negate the subject agent it in fact confronts 'in practice', in the real. This practice it confronts includes, of course, itself, the theory of the sublime. In this way the theories of the sublime we have been concerned with confront themselves as the practice for which they produce a theory: this is to say the experiential is never a topic for these theories which nevertheless posit the 'real' or experiential as their controlling delimiting practice. What we have here is the full weight of a theoretical discourse articulating the theory/practice divide in relation to its own sense of self. This indeed might be a distinct feature of those discourses we term *theoretical*.

If we take this as the true point of sight for understanding our own theory – the theoretical substance of the present book – we may note that the subject it produces, the subject as effect within discourse, must also be taken as the resistance to its own imaginary. It is clear that this is the case for what I have termed the subject-effect since the discursive positioning of the subject has been investigated entirely from within the perspective of a theoretical gaze; a gaze which has infolded, inseminated itself in order to evert from centre to margin any account of 'real' individuals, historical subjects. This gaze has conditioned and controlled the analyses put forward in Part II of this book, analyses which set out to reverse, subject to scrutiny, negate the historical intentions and trajectories of the first part.

Now, as if this were not already too involuted, we may reflect these comments onto a possible narrative of the history of the sublime/subject. Such a narrative must, by necessity, work out its own phantasmic power, and it must do this not only on theoretical grounds, which is to say on the grounds that it articulate its objectified practice, but also on account of the very nature of the sublime which is, right from its opening articulation in Longinus, phantasmic. It has been the purpose of the argument throughout the book to investigate the unilinear perspective of historical enquiry and to fracture and disrupt the positioning it creates: to subject it to an anatomical methodology. The fantasy of the opening dream of theory is to be taken, then, as the real of a certain kind of theory, the practice of a certain kind of staging, siting, positioning. How else might we understand the perspective of anatomy, as a methodology, without speaking, in another's voice, the dream of theory? Such oratorical visualization, Longinus's *phantasia*, can now be directed at what I take to be a misreading and misunderstanding of the eighteenth-century sublime, generated in part by the

standard works on the topic but more pervasively by a widely unexamined Kantian appropriation of sublimity.

Kant's critical philosophy has become sublimated within our perception of the sublime; the extent to which a Kantian perspective directs Monk's book has already been commented upon. The most notable feature of such a Kantian appropriation is the identification within eighteenth-century British aesthetics of a drive towards subjectivism, as Monk terms it, which has now become an unexamined tenet of a great deal of work on the eighteenth-century sublime. This seems to me to be misleading, at least in so far as we might distinguish the British tradition from its German counterpart. The purpose of doing this is to disengage the subjective from the aesthetic in order to phantasmize a history of the sublime, not, I would want to stress very strongly, in order to 'correct' false readings of this tradition.

The easiest way of beginning this disengagement is to register that mid-eighteenth-century accounts of the sublime do not assume a unified subject; they resist such a concept. What they perform, however, is a certain positioning of the subject; they generate a subject effect, a siting of a space of subjectivity, or, put very simply, a place within their analytic accounts which can be understood as the location for the subject. It has been one of the major aims of this entire book to effect such a description, while noting with considerable force that the sublime, when taken in its historical framework, accounts for, acts out, enables the subversion of a number of related positions. While these all concern the subject to some extent, they are to be distinguished from a real subject, the human agent who experiences, acts and so forth.

In order to make this as clear as possible the following characterization can be made: when we read eighteenth-century British aesthetics through the Kantian perspective the works of Burke through Alison look as if they *assume* a subject who experiences, acts and so forth when, as I have argued, what they set out to do is to investigate the theoretical and discursive production of that subject: they are concerned with the subject-effect, the subject position. They do this not because they take as their object the subject but because the investigation of the theoretical power of accounts of the sublime necessarily involves the production of a theoretical imaginary, the practice it sets out to control and legislate. When that imaginary practice is figured as an overplus which the theory cannot control, it looks at first as if an autonomous human agent is the excess of the theory, or the residue, that which cannot be theorized. If this autonomous agent is equated with the 'subjectivism' taken to result from Kant's critical philosophy then the subject as discursive effect becomes translated into a 'real' subject who experiences, knows and so forth. In this manner much eighteenth-century British aesthetics comes to resemble a pre-text for a topography of the individual which has its most powerful expression in Weiskel's attempt to bring Freud's theory of the unconscious in touch with the tradition of the sublime.

In distinction to this perspectivism I have attempted to create a unilinear



description of the eighteenth-century tradition: to stand my argument in the place where that tradition positions the subject. As a sceptical conclusion to that 'proper' reading we can note that an imaginary practice is in fact desired, required by the theory, not as its unwanted excess but as precisely that which it is able to figure as excessive, as the overplus. In so doing it defuses the potential threat of the practice it in fact ignores, erases, sublimates. This more telling account of the theory/practice divide can be read off the second part of the book which investigates the so called excess of the discourse of the sublime. It takes what I am here characterizing as a Kantian subject as the product of the debate during the 1750s and scrutinizes the ways in which the subject is energized, freighted, disseminated within three areas of legislation. By looking at these legislative discourses it became apparent that the autonomous subject was less the excess that could not be controlled than the required sign of the unruly, the excessive: nothing less than that which images and reflects the legislative power of the theory. While this tells back to theory its own sense of power – it speaking visualizes that power – it also, at the same time, points to, names and evicts the overplus thereby rendering it harmless and no longer excessive.

Noting this led us to speculate on the devious working of theory and to attempt to articulate its other, that which it needs to cover over. In this regard the discourse of the sublime can now be seen in terms of its phantasmic practice, by which I mean to make allusion to the term *phantasia* found in Longinus's treatise on the sublime where it means something like 'oratorical visualization' or 'images of mental representations'. *Phantasia* is one of the aids used by the orator to assist his audience in imagining, or visualizing, what he persuades them of, and it is found, notably, in Longinus's treatment of factual description.<sup>5</sup> The second part of this book has examined the subject in such a phantasmic perspective. It has investigated the subject as it speaking sees itself. This has involved a discussion of the extraordinarily reflective public surfaces of the social and the discursive for the eighteenth century. The self is, then, to be understood as both a reflection from the spoken, the discursive in that sense, and a reflecting surface refracted within the social. As we have seen in the activity of reading, for example, this produces an extremely complex situation in which the reflection given back to the speaking seeing subject is now taken from the surface of the self, now from the skin of the social, now from the inter-mirroring of both.

I intend to extend this form of analysis in conclusion by returning to my initiating perceptions and assumptions, that is, by folding the present analysis

<sup>5</sup> Longinus writes: 'What then is the effect of rhetorical visualization [*phantasia*]? There is much it can do to bring urgency and passion into our words; but it is when it is closely involved with factual arguments that it enslaves the hearer as well as persuading him...' 'Longinus' *On Sublimity*, trans. D. A. Russell (Oxford, 1965), 15.9.

back within the past opening suppositions. In doing so I hope to be able to articulate the phantasmic subject of the discourse of the sublime. This will involve our asking two related questions: what is the subject under the sign of the sublime, and what is the sublime under the sign of the subject? These two chiasmic questions challenge in a number of ways the Kantian perspective on eighteenth-century British aesthetics by operating an everted scheme in which the centred subject is moved from the true point of sight to the horizon: it is figuratively speaking decentred.

Let us consider the first question. The subject under the sign of the sublime is the excess which theory tells itself it cannot control. It does this in order to disguise the practice it cannot account for, precisely its own theoretical work. Care must be taken to insist here that the unified subject is not a product of the experiential sublime, but of the discourse of it. It is not a subject in any real sense, not a human agent, but a position within the discursive, a position waiting to be filled, to be made object, which nevertheless resists that objectification in the name of subjectivity. Turning to our second question, the sublime under the sign of the subject is that which tells the subject it is autonomous, individual; it gives to the subject its sense of self, of unity, authenticity. However, when we inquire into the status of the sublime itself, into its sense of self, we note that it lacks a narrative, a history, a form in which it can be cast unless it resorts to the mobilization of the concept of excess, the overplus. When seen under the sign of the subject the sublime takes on the contours of a theory which cannot represent to itself its own practice; it is self-divided across the absolute bar of theory and practice, self and self-image, subject for the sublime and subject in the sublime. It is this which leads it to theorize the excess as the practice of the subject. What we are pointing to here is the absence of a self-narrative of the sublime, and it is this which I am now attempting to describe in terms of the phantasmic experience of theory.

If we cast our minds back to the opening fantasy sequence, in which a figure dreams a dream of credit, of sexual identification, of identity, we can note a number of features of a possible self-narrative of the sublime/subject. In the first instance this dream contains real documented practice; it knots together various surface descriptions of real subjects from the period. It cannot represent these real experiences as real, since the narrative of the discourse of the sublime situates 'the real' as its own practice, its own production of the overplus. The self-narrative of the sublime must, then, be a counter-narrative of the real: its imaginary. In the second instance this dream is to be understood as precisely a fantasy sequence, constructed by the demands of this text, in order to bring to light the imaginary of *this* theory. When this is later revealed to be anapoptically related to the Wordsworth and Coleridge marginalia the force of the fantasy takes on slightly different values. Where before it speaks an imaginary in its own name, later it tells back the imaginary to itself through the reflection of the 'real' scene of writing for Wordsworth and Coleridge. This is to attenuate what was

once a fantasy narrative by invoking the real of the fantasy; that is to say, by invoking the staging, the siting of my own use of that fantasy. Is this a narrative model for the sublime? A speaking seeing which reflects off its own speech. Is that where the sublime tells itself to itself? If it is such a narrative form, embedding as it does all the disturbances and deviations of this last chapter, it clearly tells us as much about the dream of theory as it tells us about the history of the sublime. Here the terms *theory* and *practice* are to be understood as *endlessly oscillating*, so that the dream of theory is to be taken at one moment as the practice positioned by a history of the sublime, and at the next as its controlling and legislating force. The imaginary practice of the opening dream is a subject, a subject sublime, but we have seen just how much that imaginary practice is in fact the real practice of this theory, necessitated by the fact that its real practice cannot be taken account of, taken within. History from this perspective becomes the unaccountable real, the desired imaginary taken as the object of the final analysis only to negate and silence its own practice: the theory it speaks, the subject it speaking visualizes.

These comments, as self-reflexive as they are, can be opened out to bring to some kind of conclusion the excessive argument of this third part. I wish to do this by returning to the scene of reading and writing with which the chapter began and by rehearsing some comments about the status of the term subject. We might begin by noting that the terms 'real', 'imaginary' and 'phantasy' are deployed above in a complicated and self-regarding fashion. The reasons for this can be traced back to the discussion of the trope of eversion in chapter 2, which we should recall derives from Coleridge's discussion of the sublime interior of a church. I have attempted to construct an argument in this last part by the operation of the trope of eversion in order to defigure the assumptions and phantasmic speculations of my own theoretical discourse. This has led to an awareness of the disfiguring power of the theory/practice divide utilized throughout the second part of the book, itself a mode of interrogating the historical narrative set up in the first part. It may now be possible to bring these inter-interrogations to some kind of rest by introducing the range of meanings attaching to the term subject which were precisely evicted, cast out as beyond the boundaries of this discussion at the very beginning. These meanings are precisely those which articulate the subject as agent, the person who acts, speaks, reads. The second part of the book continually framed this sense of the subject, continually stumbled into it even as it restricted its access to the subject position: it positioned the agent almost as the unspoken, unspeakable 'truth' or 'proof' of the analytic description. This is why the three 'case histories' are placed outside the main chapters and why within those three chapters the gesture towards the 'real' of speaking, viewing and reading continually threatens to erupt, albeit in differing ways and to varying extents in each chapter. This is to note that the human agent who spoke, who spectated and who read was continually present to our discussion at its beyond, its over there.

Let us return then to the 'real' reading scene. Wordsworth and Coleridge

writing in the margins of a copy of Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry*. The first and very obvious thing to note here, evicting our earlier discussion of this text, is that a real human agent marks his, or in fact their, presences to the copy of the *Inquiry*. The text bears witness to the subject as *agent*. This is no mere cheap shot, since the substance of the romantic argument is entirely concerned with the difference between a discursive description of the subject and the sense of self felt by the subject in the real, at the point where subjectivity becomes agency.

Let us recall the comment upon the various effects of the theatrical representation: 'for whatever may be our sensations when the attention is recalled to a scenic representation how farsoever we may then lose sight of its being a mimic show, we know perfectly at the time, when we are going to see it, or when assembled at the Theatre in expectation; that it is nothing better or worse'. Here an agent *intends*, an agent *expects*, an agent *assembles*. The subject is not *only* produced by the discursive positioning of the theatrical experience, it comes already as agent to the spectacle. This sense of the agency of the individual was missing from our earlier discussion, where the frame of reference was a chronological specification of the differences between Burke, Knight and the romantic hand. Now that hand must be seen as precisely the hand which writes, as the mark of the subject who speaks, or perhaps dictates in this scene, and as the residue of the subject who reads. Inserted into the text is the reading, speaking, writing subject; an indentation into the discursive positioning of the subject-effect.

Again let us reconsider the framing which is being adverted to in the romantic marginalia. The hand writes: 'It is possible, that the mind during the representation of a tragedy may have fits of forgetfulness and deception and believe the fiction to be the reality, but the moment you suppose it in a condition to make a choice of this kind, all sense of such delusion vanishes.' The mind here, once it arrogates to itself the power of making the choice, once it acts, destroys the distance of the subject positioned by the frame of the theatrical presentation. If the mind can make that choice it must be prior to, outside, on the margins of the discursive description of subjectivity: precisely positioned in the world of the 'real', in action, agency. In the theatre the subject is a discursive effect, a positionality in the ways we have come to understand that term, but in the real the subject acts, talks, spectates and so forth.

What is emerging here is an absolute distinction between discursive descriptions of the subject and the human agent in the real. A problem arises here, however, since the theatrical experience is, as theatre, as 'real' as any other experience. It is a real not a fantasy experience in itself. In Burke's discussion there is a qualitative difference between the real of the theatre and what we might quite properly call the theatre of the real: the public execution of a 'state criminal'. When we return to the romantic insertion, however, the problem takes on extremely interesting contours.<sup>6</sup> We may recall that this discussion represents the largest intervention into Knight's text and that it begins by

making a distinction between reading a text such as Hamlet or Lear and seeing a dramatic performance. The citation above (p. 286) ends with the question 'whether . . . the delusion can be carried still further, and we may be made to believe even for a moment that the scene is not the representation of a transaction, but the transaction itself'. The comment then continues:

In our attempt to answer this question let us first ask if there be anything in the representation of a play that will tend to strengthen or prolong the first species of delusion which undoubtedly exists in reading it, viz that of the facts represented or feigned having actually occurred. I believe the answer will be no: the Playhouse, the audience, [the persons of the actors,] the lights, the scenes all [tend] interfere with that [delusion] [ception] and above all the persons gestures, and voices of the actors which [so] immediately tell us that it is Mr or Mrs Such a One. These matters of fact, while consciously before us, are insuperable bars to the Imagination. Here there is a mighty loss; & [If then] during the progress of the Piece another species of delusion were not in its stead occasionally superinduced [viz that] and by the very reason which had destroyed the [former] former, viz that the scene before us is a *reality* I do not see how it is possible that we should be *affected* to the degree [that] to which a fine tragedy exquisitely represented often does affect us. [80]

In the real of the drama we cannot evert the substance of its reality: we cannot forget that the people who act in front of us present person. They exactly *act* out person. The secondary sense of the reality of the situation may occasion another set of experiential criteria, those which the romantic hand goes on to discuss in the note. We need not address these since the substance of the comment has been discussed above (p. 286). Here I want to stress the importance of the person as agent for this analysis, and to bring out as forcefully as possible the phantasmic description of the subject.

The romantic claims that if we were to believe that the scenes presented in the drama were real we would be 'deluded'. How might this be if the drama frames the subject? How can we be fooled into taking a discursive position for the subject *as* the subject if there is only the discursive effect? We have already gone some way to answering this above by noting another description of the subject which understands it as agent. But let us look a little more closely at the romantic argument. In the citation above the answer is given as a categorical 'no' which is then followed by a quite literal hesitation of the subject, graphically given to us within the text by the material *crossed out*. The romantic doubled subject, the 'Colerword' who inserts person into this text, writes: 'I believe the answer will be

<sup>6</sup> A discussion of the marginalia in slightly different terms, but nevertheless of importance to this argument can be found in Elinor S. Shaffer, 'Coleridge's Theory of Aesthetic Interest', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXVII, no. 4 (Summer 1969), pp. 399–408.

no: the Playhouse, the audience, [the persons of the actors,] the lights, the scenes all [tend] interfere with that [delusion] [ception] and above all the persons gestures, and voices of the actors which [so] immediately tell us that it is Mr or Mrs Such a One'. Frame comes first, the Playhouse, to be followed by the audience, the positioned subject. This is then interrupted by the *person* of the actor, itself a hesitation in the comment as person comes into itself *as agent*. Having registered this presence of person, the next hesitation enacts the dilemma faced by the romantic hand: is the real of the dramatic performance a delusion, that is the site of a deluded subject, a subject blind to itself, or alternatively is it a deception, that which is seen, taken by the subject to be false, imaginary? The hand cannot decide, as we see, and in that hesitation the agency of the subject trembles as it confronts its own discursive production of itself as agent, as the *voice* which graphically interrupts (through another's hand?) the Payne Knight text. As we can see, here in this note the writing hand quite literally cannot decide, cannot write itself: it crosses out that which would have decided the subject: the decision over the choice of delusion or deception.

Lest this appear too fanciful we might return to the supposed 'real' of this situation in which Coleridge is supposed to have dictated these remarks to Wordsworth. For how is the amanuensis behaving here? Is the hesitation Coleridge's, as we might suspect from his notebook writings, or is there a hesitation in the scribe? If Coleridge is the one who has difficulty in deciding, why does the scribe cross out both 'lusion' and 'ception' thereby rendering the sentence senseless – the relevant part of the sentence reads: 'interfere with that de and above all . . . Even though the use of the term 'delusion' becomes habitual in the sentences which follow, the hesitation over 'deception' comes once again in the passage quoted above concerning the difference between knowing and feeling. What seems to be happening here is the graphic insistence of the subject as agent which is nevertheless erased, made illegible. This much is indeed commented upon by the note itself at the very end, this time in pencil (the rest of the note is in ink). The hand writes: 'The above is happily illegible, as it is very confused; but it would be easy to give it development [81]. The hand writes out its sense of the illegible even as the reading eye rereads the comments which have been dictated. These are clearly not illegible in the literal sense of the word, as is indeed made apparent: they are 'confused', hence metaphorically illegible.

This, it seems to me, is a possible frame for the subject under the sign of the sublime. It works in and out of the phantasmic reality posed by our discursive analytic in order to bring into the perspective of our view the subject as agent, the subject who here speaks, reads and spectates at the scene of writing: Coleridge dictating these marginal annotations to Payne Knight's *Analytical Inquiry*. And what it writes is the hesitation of the subject, the indecision which falls between the subject as agent and the subject as discursive effect. Its result is

to represent the subject to itself as 'illegible', not literally, but figuratively. I take it that such illegibility reflects upon our own analysis of the subject as effect, an investigation which has manifestly rendered the subject as agent unintelligible as well as illegible to the discourse of the sublime. The ramifications of this say something about a possible history of the subject but they also say as much about a practice of the politics of subjectivity under, within the discourse of the sublime.

If we invoke only a small part of what I take to be that practice it is possible to see one of the directions in which further work might proceed. If the phantasmic description of the subject in the contemporary sublime is understood as the desired excess of theory then it becomes possible to unmask, interrogate and defigure this subject position. Such an analysis would seek to make more precise how it is that the contemporary sublime has overmastered to an extraordinary extent certain discourses of politics and survival, of the subject and state. If the distinguishing feature of the discourse of the sublime is that it produces an overplus which it cannot command or control, then our contemporary figurations of the sublime moment and of the sublime object in terms of apocalypse, of the nuclear sublime<sup>7</sup> need perhaps no further explanation for their non-logics of control and deterrence, and their appropriations of holocaust and annihilation. Yet their description in terms of a discursive excess outlined in this study may enable us to disable their supporting technologies even if we are unable to defeat their sustaining ideologies. The urgency with which this task is addressed will say something about our need for the subject no matter how described.

To leave it here, however, is to echo the movement and rhythm of the sublime – something which the entire book has attempted to subvert, circumnavigate, interrogate. Such an ending in apocalypse is too much a discursive effect, too much a subjected position for an argument which has insistently refused or resisted the thought it silently thinks, the seduction it constantly creates and confronts. As a history of that refusal and resistance it presents a record of its own coming into being as history, the history of the thought it wants to think differently, over there. It is, therefore, only appropriate that its conclusion should gesture towards the limit, risk the reinversion of the boundary by speaking from the other, refusing silence to what is unsaid.

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- Addison, Joseph, 46, 47, 55  
on sublime, 45
- aesthetics  
as discourse, 28  
during eighteenth century, 27-58  
and ethics, 32, 55, 64, 80  
nineteenth-century, 27  
and theology, 45  
transformation of, 28, 55
- Alberti, Leon Baptista, 'window analogy', 49, 187, 211
- Algarotti, Francesco, on painting and optics, 188
- Alison, Archibald, 33
- anamorphosis, 201
- The Artist's Assistant*, 191
- Austin, Gilbert, 183-5
- Baillie, John, 40-3, 73
- Bank of England, 109, 122  
history of, 109-10  
its incorporation, 123; and incorporation of nation, 130-1  
and national bank, 129  
and property qualification, 118  
suspension of payments, 124, 128
- Barrell, John, 164, 174
- Beattie, James, on novels, 259
- bills of exchange, 110
- Blackstone, William, 178
- Blair, Hugh, 58, 76
- Lectures on Rhetoric*, 58, 75
- body as defigured trope, 119, 128  
in figurative space, 193  
as figure, 20, 112, 122  
individual and state joined, 128  
and money, 112-16  
of nation, 114, 122-31  
and national bank, 129-30
- place of in representation, 189  
politic, 104, 113, 120, 121  
and positionality in perspective theory, 206
- its textualization, 179
- Boswell, James, 237n
- Boulton, J.T., 62, 284
- Brisbane, John, 189
- Brown, Lancelot (Capability), 209n.
- Buchanan, James, on *Paradise Lost*, 250-1
- Burgh, James  
*The Art of Speaking in Public*, 159, 246  
on gesture, 160  
list of passions, 160
- Burke, Edmund, 91, 94, 98  
on astonishment, 70  
compared with Kames, 101  
on language, 64  
on Longinus, 71  
*Philosophical Enquiry*, 61-72, 96, 281-8  
on power, 62-72, 74, 75  
on privation, 288  
on society, 72  
on subjectivity, 65  
on sympathy, 64  
on technology of sublime, 69-70  
on terror in sublime, 62  
on tragedy, 282-4  
on transformation of power into trope, 68-9
- Burton, John, on novels, 234, 259n.
- Chirrol, J.L.  
on light reading, 261  
on women readers, 260  
civic humanism, 103, 104

## Index

- Cockin, William  
*Art of Delivering Written Language*, 239  
on personation, 244
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 43, 54, 55, 70, 91, 296, 299  
and Gerard on imagination/fancy, 83  
and Kames on primary/secondary, 93  
on personification in Burke, 288  
on subject, 46  
on the sublime, 43-7, 296  
and suspension of disbelief, 283  
Collins, Joshua, on women readers, 274
- Combe, William, on reading in church, 256  
'conversation piece', 218  
Vertue on, 218
- Cowley, John Lodge, 196n.  
credit  
and Constitution, 115  
and debt, 116  
as disease, 116  
paper, 114  
private, 126  
public, 114-16, 132-3; and public faith, 120  
Croft, George, 244n.
- De Man, Paul, 'The Resistance to Theory', 233n.
- Dike, Edwin Berk, 281  
discourse of, 10, 19  
debt, 131-9  
ethics, 104  
power, 75  
the sublime, 6, 12, 21, 35, 43, 72, 79, 86, 93, 103  
discourse on, 9, 19  
national debt, 14  
power, 75  
the sublime, 6, 12, 21, 34, 43, 56, 65, 72, 79, 86, 291  
discrete discourse, 8, 9, 23, 28, 204, 233  
aesthetics as, 32  
bourgeois individualism as, 104  
civic humanism as, 104  
discursive  
analytic, 12, 13, 81  
counter, 53
- leakage, 43, 66, 72  
limits, 52  
node, 11, 23  
topology of, 52  
transformation, 15, 30, 32, 45, 72, 93, 104  
discursive network, 6, 7, 9, 11, 28, 168  
and Seven Years War, 19  
specifically historical, 19  
distance of the eye, 195, 199  
distance of the picture, 199, 207, 223, 226, 227  
Kirby on, 194.  
doctrine of sympathy, 181
- Edwards, Edward, 194n.  
*Anecdotes of painters*, 214  
on first public exhibition of paintings, 214  
on Spring Garden exhibition, 215  
Elbank, Lord (Patrick Murray)  
and defiguration of body, 122  
on landed and trading interests, 116, 118  
on moneyed and landed property, 117, 118  
on paper money, 126  
on public debt, 120  
elocutionary movement, 146, 150, 163  
Sheridan and, 163  
Enfield, William, 239  
exhibitions of paintings  
first public, 213, 214  
Spring Garden, 215
- The female miscellany*, 242n.  
figuration  
in Burke, 287  
in Gerard, 82  
in Knight, 287  
naturalist account of, 78  
as primary/secondary, 85  
Fordyce, James  
Addresses to Young Men, 277  
on masculine virtue, 273  
on novels, 272  
*Sermons to young women*, 276n.  
Foucault, Michel, 11, 22, 223  
Fourrier, Daniel, on perspective, 199n.  
Francis, John, 124n.
- Gainsborough, Thomas, argument with Royal Academy, 217  
Gentleman, Francis  
*Introduction to Shakespeare's plays*, 180n.  
on public speaking, 157n.  
Gerard, Alexander, 62, 73, 98  
*An Essay on Taste*, 73-92  
compared with Kames, 101  
on external senses, 84  
on fancy, 82, 83  
on imagination, 82-4  
on internal sense, 89  
on moral sense and taste, 86, 88  
on primary/secondary perception, 84  
on taste as internal sense, 81, 83  
on taste as primary and secondary, 86  
Gilpin, William, 203n.  
Gisborne, Thomas, on novel reading, 264  
Godwin, William, on William Pitt, 144, 145  
Gray, Thomas, *Elegy*, 183-4  
Gwynn, J., on the need for a public academy, 213
- Hamilton, John  
on distance of the eye, 195  
on the imaginary viewing place, 193  
on perspective, 192  
on stereography, 192  
on the true point of sight, 195  
Harris, Joseph  
on banking in Venice, 124  
on industry and idleness, 122  
Haywood, Eliza, 268  
Hazlitt, William  
on galleries, 221  
'On sitting for one's picture', 220-1  
Heely, Joseph, on viewing landscape, 209n.  
Hertz, Neil, 33, 35  
Hewitt, John, on Bank of England, 123  
Highmore, Joseph  
on sequential viewing, 209  
on the true point of sight, 208  
Hipple, Walter, 32  
historical method, 17, 186
- history  
and its imaginary, 296  
and land, 117, 119  
Hogarth, William, 187n., 213  
Holcroft, Thomas, 235n.  
on 'availability of books, 252  
Holmes, John, 36  
on pronunciation, 147  
on rhetoric, 148  
Hutcheson, Francis, *An Inquiry concerning beauty*, 32
- Jackson, Williams, on novel reading, 268n.  
Jeffrey, Francis, 81  
Johnson, Samuel, 174, 176  
preface to catalogue of Royal Academy exhibition, 215  
Jones, J., 152n.
- Kames, Lord (Henry Home), 62  
compared with Burke and Gerard, 101  
on completeness, 97  
*Elements of Criticism*, 92-102  
on infinite series, 98  
on internal/external senses, 101  
on mirroring or splitting, 93-4, 101  
on primary/secondary, 93-4  
on resemblance/contrast, 97  
on unbounded prospect, 99  
Kant, Immanuel, 293  
Kaufman, Paul  
on libraries, 235n., 253n.  
on women readers, 237  
Kirby, John Joshua, 194n.  
distance of the eye, 199n.  
*Dr Brook Taylor's Method of Perspective*, 196  
on true point of sight, 196  
Knight, Richard Payne, 33  
An analytical inquiry, 281-9  
Knox, Vicissimus, on reading at the frisseur, 271n.
- Lackington, James, on reading, 252  
*The lady's preceptor*, 180n.  
Lamb, Charles, 257n.  
Lavater, J.C., Essays on Physiognomy, 206n.  
Leigh, Edward, 113n.  
Leland, Thomas, 78, 157n.,

- on the passions, 149n.  
 on trope, 149n.  
 Lemoine, Henry, on gesture, 158n.  
 Leslie, Charles, on reading, 252  
 Leslie, G.D., on 'the line', 216  
 Lindsay, Julia Ira, 281  
 Longinus, 55  
 on *phantasia*, 292, 294  
 On *the Sublime*, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39,  
 40, 56  
 Mangin, Rev. Edward  
 on women readers, 275  
 on writing and reading novels,  
 265n.  
 Mason, John, on reading, 240n.  
 Melmoth, Courtney, on illicit  
 reading, 258  
 modernity, 119  
 money  
 and the body, 112-16  
 coin vs paper, 111, 121  
 and discursive excess, 109  
 as disease, 121  
 and flow of capital, 106  
 real and imaginary, 136-8  
 troped, 147  
 as virus, 126  
 and writing, 109, 110  
 Monk, Samuel Holt, 289, 293  
 Moore, John, on reading, 258  
 moral sense  
 coextensive with taste, 86  
 in Gerard, 86-91  
 in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, 77  
 as standard of judgment, 81  
 More, Hannah  
 on hard reading, 270  
 on novel reading, 268  
*Structures on Education*, 255n., 257  
 on study, 269  
 on writing novels, 264n.  
 national bank  
 and Bank of England, 128-9  
 as body, 129-30  
 creation of, 127-8  
 and representation of debt, 135  
 national debt, 21, 106-30  
 as discursive excess, 135  
 and France, 107  
 and health of nation, 114  
 interest on, 107  
 as virus, 118  
 natural language, 166  
 Noble, Edward  
*Elements of Linear Perspective*, 199  
 on true point of sight, 200  
 novels  
 as degenerate, 257  
 derision of, 259  
 history of, 237  
 reading of, 234n., 235n., 253-65  
 'rise' of, 235  
*Nymphomania*, 263n.  
 orator  
 body of, 151, 152; *see also* Wesley,  
 John  
 power of, 150, 242  
 oratorical theory, 38  
 Perceval John, on constitution, 129  
 Percival, Thomas, 232n.  
*Perspective, or the art of drawing*, 202  
 perspective theory, 21, 186-212  
 as ethical system, 204  
 as legislation, 198  
 and optics, 200  
*The Philosophy of the Passions*, 167  
 Pitt, William, 140, 143-5  
 Pocock, J.G.A., 115n.  
 on property and personality, 117n.  
 political economy, 34, 103  
 portraiture, 219  
 Hazlitt on, 220-1  
 positionality  
 of the body, 206  
 and perspective, 201, 212  
 of subject, 193, 212  
 and true point of sight, 194  
 of viewing, 192  
 Port, J.H.  
 on genres, 211  
 on viewing landscape, 210  
 power, 53, 58, 66  
 and consciousness, 71  
 discourse on/of, 75  
 as linguistic counter, 65, 67  
 transfer of, 76  
 and voice, 70, 176  
*see also* Burke, Edmund, on power  
 and autonomous subject, 187  
 identification between viewer and  
 artist, 195, 197

- landscapes, 208  
 paintings vs the real, 210  
 painted ceilings, 208  
 painted landscapes, 210  
 Price, Richard, on real and  
 imaginary money, 138  
 Priestley, Joseph  
 compared with Sheridan on texts  
 and subject, 178  
 on grammar, 173  
 on public academy, 174  
 and theory of mind, 181  
 on voice, 176  
 on writing, 175, 176  
 property, and propriety, 21, 163

## reading

- dispersal of subject, 244  
 novels as disease, 262  
 and personation, 240, 244  
 scene, 240, 254  
 and sexuality, 236  
 'voice', 239  
 reading theory, 16, 231-4  
 and discourse of sublime, 257  
 overplus of, 271  
 and practice, 22, 245  
 as technology, 251  
 Reynolds, Frances  
 on beauty, 49, 50  
 on grace, 50, 52, 53  
 on sublime, 49-56  
 on truth, 49, 50  
 rhetorical theory, 36, 39, 40  
 and natural account of, 79  
 Rice, John  
 on personation, 245  
 on reading, 243  
 Richardson, Jonathan, 212  
 Robertson, Joseph, on novel reading,  
 263, 272  
 Royal Academy  
 first exhibitions, 215  
 need for, 213  
 Scarlett, John, 110  
 Seven Years War, 106-12  
 Shearer, Edna Aston, 281  
 Sheridan, Thomas, 95, 239, 242  
*Art of Reading*, 175, 241n., 276  
 and auto-eroticism, 180  
 on British constitution, 168  
*British Education*, 165  
 compared with Priestley on text  
 and subject, 178  
 on contractual government, 172  
 and elocutionary movement, 163  
 on English language, 164  
*Lectures on Elocution*, 166, 168, 231  
 on oratorical performance, 151  
 on place of the subject, 180  
 on public/private, 167  
 on public reading, 231, 240  
 on public speaking, 179  
*A rhetorical grammar*, 57, 177, 230,  
 240  
 quotes Locke, 166  
 on silent reading, 276  
 on texts, 175  
*Sheridan and Henderson's Practical  
 Method*, 248-50  
 Smith, Adam, 155n.,  
 on the Imitative Arts, 203-6  
 on internal states, 207  
 on the mirror, 205, 206  
 on physiognomy, 207  
 South Sea Bubble, 123  
 South Sea Company, 110  
*The art of speaking*, 181n.  
*The Art of Speaking in Public*, 150  
 on body, 151  
 on gesture, 151  
 Steele, Richard, on reading, 257n.  
 Stirling, John, 36  
 subject  
 aesthetic, 54  
 as agent, 4, 291, 297  
 annihilation of, 45  
 as autonomous, 46, 81, 152, 159,  
 187, 198, 290  
 chronology of, 43  
 distance of, 198, 199, 206  
 'effect', 5, 18, 169, 290, 292, 297  
 ethical, 54  
 feminized, 230  
 and history, 4  
 identification with artist, 195  
 metaphors of, 18  
 as overplus, 19, 198  
 its place, 180  
 'position', 5, 18  
 its positionality, 193, 212, 217, 218  
 and propriety, 129  
 as self-authenticating, 93, 150  
 spacing of, 109, 233, 291  
 and taste in Gerard, 90

- technology of, 45  
 as text, 178, 182, 245  
 as trope, 18, 23  
 subjectivity  
   construction of, 17  
   as leakage, 170  
 sublime  
   and beautiful, 31  
   as discursive analytic, 34  
   ethical, 51, 80  
   and excess, 32  
   and gender differentiation, 56, 57  
   Longinian, 64  
   natural, 33  
   nuclear, 300  
   as prefigurative of experience, 79  
   rhetorical, 39–40, 56  
   as technology, 69, 70  
   and terror, 62  
   topology of, 53
- taste, 77, 85  
 as arbiter in aesthetic judgment, 91  
   as internal sense, 81  
   as moral sense, 79, 86, 89, 91  
   and its objects in Gerard, 87  
   as prefigurative of experience, 81  
   and the subject in Gerard, 90  
 Taylor, Brook  
   on the distance of the picture, 194  
   *Linear Perspective*, 187  
   on painting, 190  
   on perspective, 189  
 theory  
   imaginary of, 16  
   self-awareness of, 63  
   theory/practice distinction, 15, 16, 20  
   theory of vision, 49  
   and perception, 50, 52  
 transport  
   as figure, 36, 37  
   and language, 76  
   and oratory, 40, 58  
   and reading, 232, 250  
   of sexual union, 56  
   of the sublime, 39, 57  
 tropes  
   art/reality in Knight, 287  
   body, 112  
   body politic, 104  
   eversion, 47, 48, 53–4, 105, 296
- fiction/reality in Burke, 287  
 imagination/reality in Coleridge, 287  
   of language and nation, 174  
   'master', 48  
   mirroring in Kames, 93–4  
   money, 121  
   power, 67, 69  
   primary/secondary, 85, 87, 93–4  
   synecdoche, 190  
   transport, 57: *see also* transport  
   true point of sight, 187, 207  
   Hamilton on, 195  
   Highmore on, 208  
   Kirby on, 196  
   Noble on, 200  
   as positionality, 194  
 Turner, Thomas, diary of 105n., 121n.
- Vertue, George, on the conversation piece, 218
- Walker, John, 154n.  
   *Elements of Elocution*, 161n.  
   on gesture, 157n.  
   on personation, 244  
   on reading, 240n.
- Wallace, Robert, on paper money, 132
- Warrington Academy, 176
- Watts, Isaac, *The Art of Reading*, 238
- Weiskel, Thomas, 33, 34, 44, 293
- Wesley, John  
   on eyes in oratorical performance, 154  
   on face in oratorical performance, 155, 156  
   on gesture, 153–8  
   on rules of speaking, 158  
   on tone of voice, 152
- Whately, Richard, on reading, 245
- White, Hayden, 48n.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 202n.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary, *Mary*, 275
- women readers, 236, 237, 243, 254, 256  
   and marriage, 262  
   women's reading scene, 254, 260, 266–78
- Wordsworth, William, 281, 296, 299  
   dream of the Arab in *The Prelude*, 287