Table of Contents

The Sublime and Education

About This Volume

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by J. Jennifer Jones; essays by Christopher Braider, Frances Ferguson, Paul Hamilton, Anne C. McCarthy, Forest Pyle, and Deborah Elise White; and an afterword by Ian Balfour.

What kind of scene of instruction is built into the sublime experience, or is the sublime antithetical to the teaching paradigm? Consider Socrates' dialogues, for instance. The great ones may be ninety percent about instruction (they are seminars), but then there is the ten percent in which he soars out of the dialogue into sublime myth-telling. In those moments, does he actually instruct, or is something else happening that leaves his students behind except possibly through a kind of identification or transference with the role of the teacher-who-leaves-his-students-in-the-dust? And how does all this sort with the notion of application? Can there be an applied sublime? Is there not just a transcendental but an immanent sublimity? An immersive sublimity? What can we learn by critiquing the stories by which we have been taught of and with the sublime? How do we teach the sublime well? How can we continue to be good students of the sublime? How might we practice immanent critique in the face of the sublime?

"The Sublime and Education" offers a series of essays in which contributors meditate on how the concept of education intersects with sublime theory and Romantic aesthetics more generally.

Broadly speaking, this volume produces a set of revisionary readings rooted in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant and its place in our ongoing understanding of Romantic aesthetics and sublime theory. Kant's philosophy serves as critically-engaged foundation for a volume that also offers a highly-diverse body of texts and methods of interpretation, criticism, and critique that moves between Romantic-era literature and cultural theory of the 20th and 21st centuries.

An underlying inspiration of this volume is the pedagogical theory of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has thought widely about humanities-based training using Romantic-era texts as principal theoretical and literary tools, formative among them the aesthetic philosophy of Kant. Spivak's pedagogical theory can perhaps best be apprehended through the adroit but monumentally graceful claim that proper pedagogy consists in "the uncoercive rearrangement of desires," which is also to say a pedagogy founded on a notion of an immanent rather than a transcendental sublime. In complementary but nevertheless diverse and highly-individuated ways, contributors offer just this type of reformative work. Taken together, the contributions of this volume are inspirational of the simultaneously abstract and practical idealism that adheres in a pedagogy whose goal is the uncoercive rearrangement of desires.

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About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

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

About the Contributors

J. Jennifer Jones is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Rhode Island. She teaches late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century British literature & culture with a focus on Romantic poetry, poetics, and aesthetics, as well as Romantic-era philosophy and contemporary cultural theory. She has published articles and book reviews in *Studies in Romanticism*, *Romantic Circles Praxis*, *Eighteenth Century Life*, and *Romantic and Victorian Literature on the Net (RAVON)* and is working on a book project entitled *Virtual Romanticism*

Forest Pyle is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Oregon. His work explores the problems and possibilities posed by aesthetic experience, particularly in the context of Romantic and post-Romantic literature. His first book, The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism (Stanford University Press, 1995), examined the ideological workings and implications of the Romantic concept of the imagination from Wordsworth and Coleridge through George Eliot. He is presently completing a book manuscript on "radical aestheticism," a term that describes the nature of a recurring event in certain of the most powerful and resonant texts of the British Romantic literary tradition. He is interested in the various forms and effects of this aesthetic radicalization in a strain of Romanticism that extends from Percy Shelley and Keats through Dickinson, Hopkins, and Dante Rossetti through Wilde..

Christopher Braider is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is the author of three books, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400-1700* (1993), *Indiscernible Counterparts: The Invention of the Text in French Classical Drama* (2002), and *Baroque Self-Invention and Historical Truth: Hercules at the Crossroads* (2004). He has just completed a fourth book, *The Matter of Mind: Reason and Experience in the Age of Descartes*, for which he received an NEH fellowship in 2005/06.

Anne C. McCarthy is a PhD candidate in English and B. Altman Dissertation Fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center. She is working on a dissertation titled, *"That Willing Suspension": Signification and the Ethics of Literary Form in 19th-Century British Poetry.* Her work has also appeared in *Victorian Poetry*. She teaches in the First Year Writing Program at the New School's Eugene Lang College.

Deborah Elise White is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Emory University. Her publications include Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History (Stanford 2000) and essays and review articles on Shelley, Coleridge, Hugo, Freud, and De Man. She is currently writing a book manuscript on the rhetoric and poetics of dates in nineteenth-century writing about revolution.

Paul Hamilton is Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of *Metaromanticism* (Chicago, 2003) and *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (Continuum, 2007) and is currently working on a comparative study of European Romanticism.

Frances Ferguson is Mary Elizabeth Garrett Professor in Arts and Sciences and Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in English at Johns Hopkins University. She is author of *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-spirit*, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuality*, and *Pornography, The Theory: What Utilitarianism Did To Action* and essays on eighteenth and nineteenth century literature and on literary theory. She is currently working on a study of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and a discussion of recent accounts of reading.

Ian Balfour is Professor of English and of Social & Political Thought at York University. He is the author of several books, including *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, and numerous essays on popular and unpopular culture. With the filmmaker Atom Egoyan, he co-edited *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* and with Eduardo Cadava "And Justice for All?: The Claims of Human Rights" for *South Atlantic Quarterly*. He was also the sole editor of a *SAQ* volume on Late Derrida. For 2010-11, he is the M.H. Abrams Distinguished Visiting Professor of English at Cornell. He's now completing a book on the sublime.

The Sublime and Education

Introduction: Romantic Training: Education and the Sublime

J. Jennifer Jones, University of Rhode Island

I. Romantic Training

1. This issue is devoted to exploring some of the ways we can think the entanglements of two concepts that are constitutive of Romanticism but are not often thought together, education and the sublime. What do these concepts share? A first response might well be *mastery*.[1] A subject of education masters a field, a discipline, a skill, a practice; in turn she can become a master, newly contributing to and thus widening the given field or discipline in which she has been trained. A Longinian reader experiences a sense of pleasurable self-aggrandizement, what has been translated from the *Peri Hypsous* as "joy and vaunting," when the sublime enables her temporarily to identify the accomplishments of great writers and the experiences of great literature as her own accomplishments and experiences. A Burkean spectator enjoys a similar sense of self-aggrandizement and power in the knowledge that he can experience danger, pain, and even death vicariously, well out of immediate danger of suffering the bodily effects of any of them. The Kantian faculty of Reason demonstrates its capacity to transcend nature by substituting the failures of Imagination for the meta-conceptualization of itself as a free moral agent independent of the limits of the sensual world Imagination attempts to represent and of which it is a part. The notion of a shared promise of mastery—which, as we shall see, is a term in these pages always already under erasure insofar as it figures a practice whose attentiveness to contingency prevents it from settling into totality—proved a valuable entry point both for beginning to think the relation of these two terms and for thinking the types of reductions and preconceptions that this exercise might engender. As a group, the essays collected here might be understood as a highly sophisticated extension of the conversation noted above as they revise and renew discourses of romantic *education* and the *sublime* and the intricate entanglements in and with one another that the question of their commonality draws to attention.

2. As many of this issue's contributors suggest in their respective ways, and as Frances Ferguson so succinctly declares at the opening of her essay, the words education and sublime might seem at first to have in common only their contrasts. Typically, education involves confinement, regimentation, and discipline, and the sublime unrestraint and freedom. Furthermore, as Forest Pyle asserts at the opening of his essay, while sublime theory and criticism is eminently teachable (through disciplined classroom learning in a university setting, for example) the aesthetic experience of the sublime is not. "A sublime *experience*, after all, would be 'pre-critical,' and what pedagogy worthy of the name would aspire to that?" asks Pyle. Likewise, for Kant, who serves as a philosophical starting point for much of the work of this issue, aesthetics has no foundation, and so unlike science it cannot be taught. The subjective nature of aesthetic judgment means that it *can* be shared, and always feels as though it *must* be shared, but *that* we share it is not certain. Such commonality cannot be taught, enforced, or monitored. What I judge to be beautiful or sublime will always seem to me as though it ought necessarily to be observed and experienced as such by you and indeed by everyone. But, as Chris Braider argues in his essay, though "we would say that we could not be the creatures we are and not feel (or at any rate not be capable of feeling) the call of the sublime," there is simply no guarantee that the experience of others will accord with our own in matters of aesthetic judgment.

3. Turning to the example of *The Prelude*, we know that central forces at work in the spectral narrative of development of that poem are simultaneously pedagogical and aesthetic, so much so that it is easy to

take that entanglement for granted. We would be remiss to teach *The Prelude* in any context, however introductory or advanced, without drawing attention to the poetic speaker's early claim that he "grew up / Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (1805, I.305-306)—trained, that is, through and by aesthetics. "School" (1799, I.80), as we come to learn, is not, as a rule, populated by human adults who serve as pedagogues, save dead ones, and even those by proxy.[2] The instructors, tutors, and guides that transform the poem's speaker from a "naked savage" (1799, I.26) into a mature Poet with the requisite knowledge, wisdom, and skill to be "capable / Of building up a Work that should endure" (1805, XIII.278-279) are non-human agential entities—"spirits" (1799, I.69); "powers" and "genii" (I.186); "a forming hand" (1805, II.382)—whose work, however indirect and spectral, is positively felt as disciplinary, and whose identities and effects are read as worldly manifestations of the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime.

4. The fact that Wordsworth imposes eighteenth-century aesthetic categories onto what we would come to recognize as Romantic-era pedagogical agents is not especially controversial. It is an acknowledged facet of the poem in all of its three major published versions. As the editorial note early in Part I of the 1799 version suggests, it has long been assumed that we ought to make sense of Wordsworth's invocation of these aesthetic categories as either the work of his "instinct" or his "training" (Wordsworth, Abrams, Gill 6, note 2). It has been the goal of this issue to create an occasion for its contributors to meditate on the wide body of texts—philosophical, literary, critical, theoretical—around which and upon which such an assumption is based, and to think carefully and capaciously about these beautiful pedagogues, and particularly these sublime pedagogues, that haunt not just *The Prelude* but Romanticism and sublime theory more generally.

5. Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy* is lesser-known example of a Romantic-era text that puts education in direct conversation with aesthetics, and, while this text is relatively obscure even in Kant's oeuvre, it does also help to crystallize the ways in which the "practice" (441) of pedagogy is constitutively aesthetic in Kant's more influential work, the critical philosophy in particular.[3] This text's opening claim is haunting in its allure to simplicity and its provocation of complexity: "The human being is the only creature that must [and presumably *can*] be educated" (437). Its complexity becomes plain, however, when Kant offers an example that is urgent (as Ferguson argues is often the case with Kant's examples) and all the more so for also being named a sole exception. This is the example and exception of song birds. According to Kant, no animal "*learns anything* . . . except birds, in their singing. This they are taught . . . *just like in a school*" (438; my emphasis) by their parents. And so as with the nightingale and the lark it is also with the human being: what we take most for granted, what would seem constitutive of our understanding of *being* itself—that a bird can sing the "self same song" as its forebears, or that a human being is in fact born human—turn out to be learned practices the apprehension of which require (proper) education. For, according to Kant, if you switch nightingales and larks at birth, you will get night birds who sing the morning's song and morning birds who sing the night's song. It is the same with human beings: "The human being can only become human through education. He is nothing except what education makes out of him" (439).

6. The most notable site of struggle in this text occurs around the concept of training. Kant defines training as the precondition of the more complex work of instruction. Training is defined as "the discipline that merely prevents errors" and the latter as guidance in the "exercise of that which one has learned" (446). Put another way, "*Training* is . . . merely negative . . . the action by means of which man's tendency to savagery is taken away. *Instruction* . . . is the positive part of education" (438; my emphasis). Likewise, training is associated with the disciplinary and mechanical, whereas instruction is associated with imagination and freedom: "the child must always feel its freedom; in such a way, however, that it not hinder the freedom of others. Therefore it must find resistance. . . . In breaking their self-will, nothing is more harmful than a vexatious, slavish discipline" (455).

7. And yet, training and its corollaries, discipline and restraint, are by no means "mere" in the way that Kant at first suggests. As he writes further on, "Education . . . *must not merely be mechanical* but must be based on principles. But neither must education be merely through rational argument, rather it must still be *mechanical in a certain way*" (445; my emphasis). It becomes clear that the balance between mechanical and dynamic education, and so the place of training, turns out to be critical and constitutive, as well as difficult to decide and to reach. As Kant himself admits in spite of his various and overlapping admonitions about the matter, "One of the biggest problems of education is how one can unite submission under lawful constraint with the capacity to use one's freedom. For constraint is necessary. *How do I cultivate freedom under constraint*?" (447; my emphasis).

8. This question—how do I cultivate freedom under constraint?—crystallizes the centrality of the problem of education to Kant's larger critical project and the centrality of aesthetics, specifically the sublime, to education. Intentionality aside, Kant answers this question most poignantly by demonstrating his desire and yet his inability to maintain his theory of educational training as the precondition for instruction. The work of mechanical repetition that Kant associates with training is supposed to lay the groundwork for the more complex intellectual work of moral instruction. However, the sequencing that would privilege dynamic instruction over mechanical training is undermined in *Lectures on Pedagogy*. In fact, the concept of training permeates Kant's theory of moral education to such an extent that his attempt to enforce a hierarchical sequence between training and instruction collapses.

9. For example, "Strength, skillfulness, agility, and secureness" (457), as Kant describes them, are outcomes of early and persistent exposure to the mechanics of physical repetition training. Consider, for example, the following particularly sublime example of the effects of good physical training in education, paying specific attention to the ways that physical training is constitutive rather than preconditional of education :

    > one should always be able to walk on narrow footpaths, on steep heights where one faces an abyss, or on a shaky support. If a human being cannot do these things, he is not completely what he could be . . . It is very admirable when one reads how the Swiss already accustom themselves from youth to walk in the mountains, and how much skill they develop in this respect, so that they can walk on the narrowest footpaths with complete confidence and jump over chasms . . . But most people are afraid of an imaginary fall, and this fear as it were paralyzes their limbs, so that for them such a walk then involves danger. This fear normally increases with age, and one finds that it is particularly common among men who work a lot with their head. (457)

    This passage exemplifies the ways in which, for Kant, there is something essentially physical not only about training but also about education generally, by which I mean the end of education, which is moral education. Only an education which includes the practice of a disciplined repetitive activity of a specifically physical and rigorous—even risky—nature can produce a fully self-realized human being, a being who is "completely what he could be"—this effect of self realization being one that no amount of mental training can produce on its own and which it might even undermine, given that the frailty described above is noted as "common among men who work a lot with their head."

10. This entanglement of mechanical training and dynamic instruction in Kant's model of education becomes clearer again when we contemplate that, for Kant, not just training but all education is coercive. The question of how to cultivate freedom under constraint in the pedagogical setting is all the more complex taking into consideration this axiom. As he states, "The first stage in the pupil's development is that in which he must show obsequiousness and passive obedience; in the other he is allowed to make use of reflection and of his freedom, though under laws. In the first there is a

mechanical, in the other a moral coercion" (446). Here the pedagogical setting seems more sublime than ever. We might map mechanical coercion onto the physical training that he describes above. By learning through repetition that one can "walk on narrow footpaths, on steep heights where one faces an abyss, or on a shaky support," one learns the discipline of overcoming one's fears of physical harm, which is borne out in the claim that those who do not get this type of training are in more "danger" of falling into chasms and abysses than those who do. To map this educational theory onto the Kantian sublime, one might say that physical training produces a fully-realized human being who can experience the sublime—an experience of virtual terror with the requisite distance from actual harm that constitutes the sublime. The lack of such training produces beings who can merely experience fear, and, likely, injury or death. Kant's theory imagines an ideal in which the student experiences moral instruction as sublime, so that her constraints are both felt and transcended, but actually his pedagogical theory demonstrates that both are illusions bent on—and produced by—training. Coercive to the core, education is, from this perspective, always ultimately achieved through force of illusion, a force that appears to be, and in some ways is, sublime. This notion of illusion and/as force in the pedagogical context is central to Deborah Elise White's reading of Derrida's meditations on the "sublime" landscape of Cornell University in her contribution to this issue, which she then uses as a means to think rigorously not only on Kant's sublime and Derrida's reformed Kant, but also to theorize a Derridian sublime that precisely opens itself to the terrors the Kantian sublime tries to contain, specifically with regard to the university, which, as White argues, "can only be adequate to its *inadequation* to the philosophical idea of reason that it supposedly embodies" (par 8).

11. Taking into consideration this issue's focal points of Romanticism, education, and the sublime, and with the hope of thinking carefully about what these terms can mean together today, I can think of no better theory of pedagogy to introduce at this juncture than that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has thought widely about humanities-based training using Romantic-era texts as principal theoretical and literary tools. And while some contributors take up Spivak's work explicitly—two examples are Forest Pyle's meditations on being Spivak's student and Paul Hamilton's attentiveness to Spivak's work on the subaltern as one of numerous examples of symptoms of various critical investments that precede and thus shape sublime theory and criticism of the twentieth century—and some do not, I draw her work on pedagogy to attention because it has been critical to my interest and inspiration throughout this project and so has done much to shape it. A central stake in Spivak's pedagogical work is to perform readings of Romantic poetry and philosophy in order to develop a theory of imagination, which she approaches first by reading Kant on the sublime and then linking her interpretation of the Kantian faculty of imagination to British Romantic poetry: "Romanticism was a strike for the robust imagination—for me, it is summarized in Shelley's remark . . . that 'we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know.' It is the ability to imagine the other side as another human being, rather than simply an enemy . . . that is the greatest gift of romanticism" (100-101). Imagination is linked, in Spivak's work, to pedagogy —her argument is that what is important today is a very specific form of training linked explicitly and solely to the humanities. Such training entails "a preparation for the eruption of the ethical," which in turn entails a continuous "interruption of the epistemological" (83). This model of pedagogy Spivak defines as "cultural instruction in the exercise of the imagination" (94).

12. To understand more fully what is meant by the "interruption of the epistemological," it will be useful to turn to Spivak on Kant. Spivak describes the structure of the Kantian sublime in the following way: "the thing is too big for me to grasp; I am scared; Reason kicks in by the mind's immune system and shows me, by implication, that the big thing is mindless, 'stupid' in the sense in which a stone is stupid, or the body is. I call the big mindless thing 'sublime'" (94). Spivak's focus is on the ways in which the cognitive faculties interact and affect one another in the context of the Kantian sublime. What is noteworthy here is that she takes the efforts of the Imagination as her over-arching model rather than prioritizing the culminating work of reason: Imagination's encounter with radical alterity is to represent the encounter but without objective concepts, work that Spivak calls figuration and which she

associates strongly with (Romantic) literature, particularly poetry. It is Imagination's greatest lesson, for Spivak, that it fails to turn the sublime object it encounters into an object, or body, of knowledge. Furthermore, she does not understand the work of reason finally to overcome or master, but more to extend or complement, that of Imagination. In this instance, the "big . . . mindless . . . thing" that is the sublime remains oblique to the "calculative" objectifications of which reason is capable. It apprehends, but cannot grasp, the radical alterity of the sublime object, and it acknowledges without overcoming the work of figuration of the Imagination. The result is a capacity for the viewing subject *to resonate with*, but not to *know*, the sublime other, which, as Deborah Elise White reminds us, is in keeping with Kant's own sense of the effect of Imagination's failure, (sublime) vibration. "It is," writes Spivak, "an imaginative exercise in experiencing the impossible—stepping into the space of the other" (94)[4]—an exercise Anne McCarthy's essay takes quite seriously and models finely. McCarthy theorizes the ways in which Coleridge's *Christabel* produces encounters with that thing that represents not only supreme failure, particularly where education is concerned, but also a sense of the supremely alien: stupidity.

13. Spivak's resonant faculties figure the Kantian sublime as a radical pedagogical model, a model of apprehension that is also and at once an act of letting go—of knowledge, of objectification, of mastery—a model that grasps *for*, but does not grasp, that produces acts neither of desperation nor indifference but rather acts of responsibility. Thus it is imaginative apprehension, as opposed to the possession of knowledge, which constitutes responsibility and the political work it entails. "When we confine our idea of the political to cognitive control alone," she argues, "it closes off response altogether. We end up talking to ourselves, or to our clones abroad" (87). Thus, to respond is to resonate with rather than to know. In turn, this imaginative practice will pre-figure change—it will not only produce a relation to the other that is based in the newly-defined and ever-evolving present but will make it possible for the present to reconfigure. Resonance is a means to conceptualize the present through the dynamic of rhythm rather than the problematic of knowledge.

14. Teaching us to think education itself with a critical imagination that she forms by modeling this very critical imagination in her readings of Kant, Spivak's pedagogy can perhaps best be apprehended through what I perceive as the adroit but also monumentally graceful claim that proper pedagogy consists in "the uncoercive rearrangement of desires" (81). With this formulation Spivak performs the critical work that she has also theorized widely in her work, reading Kant with integrity at the same time that she decouples him from historical specificity and uses her reformation of him as a means for theorizing how to think and act in the present. Out of the necessary coercion of the pedagogical setting that we can so clearly read as sublime in Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy* now comes, through Spivak's reading of Kant, precisely an uncoercive pedagogy, one that not only transcends the sublime by detranscendentalizing Reason but also theorizes a detranscendentalized sublime. While its substance necessarily and rightly exceeds a single concept, it can still be said that it is Spivak's pedagogical theory, in particular what we might call this immanent pedagogical sublime, which inspired me to imagine and create the occasion of this issue. And in my estimation, each contributor has taken up this reformative work in ways that are both individually and synthetically inspirational of the simultaneously abstract and practical idealism that adheres in a pedagogy whose goal is the uncoercive rearrangement of desires.

II. The Case of the Horse

15. The very important work of contextualization, synthesis, and evaluation is work that one has come to expect in an introduction. Ian Balfour's Afterword to this issue, entitled "Afterthoughts on the Sublime & Education; Or, Teachable Moments?" accomplishes this work with all of the characteristic erudition, insight, and flair that defines his thought and writing. To complement Balfour's contribution to this issue, I have chosen to use the space of the Introduction as one in which to offer a sense of my

inspiration for this issue, which I hope I have begun to lay out above, and also to make a contribution to it, which I hope will take shape in what remains.

16. Balfour argues that it is the centrality of *the example* in sublime discourse that enables that discourse to manifest with the complexity that it does within the broad outlines of what constitutes it.[5] For Kant, as we saw with the exceptional case of song birds in his pedagogical theory, examples are critical and urgent in the same way that Balfour traces them in sublime discourse more generally. It is the example, too, that so often provides a pedagogical bridge between present-day students of Romanticism and the sublime of, say, P.B. Shelley, as Pyle's essay deftly performs and theorizes. Furthermore, writes Balfour, it is "[i]n Kant, perhaps more than in any other thinker, [that] we witness the unlikely combination of the sublime and education, and their endless provocations." For Wordsworth too, I would suggest, the example works in this way; for what is the sublime of *The Prelude* if not a collection of examples whose critical legacy, taken together, intimates a shared sense of a Romantic sublime—the boat-stealing episode, the cliff-side ravens' nest-stealing episode, the ice-skating episode, the boy of Winander episode, and so on—each of which, in turn, in their shared obsessions with stealth, communion, and vertiginousness, suggest a haunted and haunting pedagogy at work that is in line with Kant's "training" and Spivak's "practice" and "preparation."

17. In the spirit of Kant, whose song birds haunt my sense of what a sublime pedagogy might be; and too, in the spirit of Wordsworth, whose owls, now silent in the face of the Boy's calls, now responsive, and in anticipation of whose "quivering peals, / And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud / Redoubled and redoubled" (1805 V.401-403) is also the haunt of my sense of what a sublime pedagogy might be, I shall now offer an example in the mode of a critical response that takes its inspiration precisely from the uncertainty that produces readers out of us that hang from the sky rather than stand on the ground.[6]

18. This example concerns what might seem at first to be an unlikely case, though at minimum it is no more or less strange than Kant's song birds: it is the case of the horse. For their purpose Kant's birds are a well-chosen example. Recalling the "self same song" of Keats's nightingale, song birds are familiar insofar as they have long been understood to be human*like*: they are agents of the fundamentally aesthetic work of producing song and the fundamentally human act of teaching those songs to future generations of birds, parent to child. Structurally, Kant's birds are strikingly brief—they comes and go in a flash—which, if it were thought in those terms, would be its sublimity, a specifically Kantian sublimity of pedagogical coercion. Within this context, it is really no surprise, and even makes perfect sense, that it would be song birds, and of the specific pace in which they are rendered, that serve as the sole exception to the otherwise solely human register of Kant's pedagogical theory. As a critical response I hope my horse example can appear equally well chosen, even as it attempts to harness the confoundedness of boundary between human and animal that the "echoes" "redoubled and redoubled" along the cliffs of Winander perhaps more than the certainty of Kant's simile. Finally, I hope that my work with the example of the horse suggest that a stretched example—one that moves slowly, one that does not appear and disappear in the flash of thought but remains meditatively present, as does Keats's nightingale over the eight stanzas of the ode—might be asymmetrically instructive, might model the practice of a Kantian-inspired pedagogy with a difference.

19. First to context. Horses haunt literature, criticism, and philosophy as birds do, and like birds horses have been understood in those contexts to be a means for theorizing humanity and inhumanity and for theorizing the limits and possibilities of education. Calling only a few examples to mind, there is the prominent use of the exemplars of horsemanship and the horse in the opening paragraphs of Sir Philip Sidneyâ€ ™s *Defence of Poesy* (1580 / 1595), in which Sidney establishes a tone for his work to come by turning a pedagogical standard of Scholasticism on its head[7] through his whimsical and witty ‘recollection’ of a teacher who made the case that “Skill of government was but a pedenteria in

comparison” to good horsemanship and that horses are “peerless . . . the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that, if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse” (95)[8]; Edmund Burke's illustration of the distinction between what is and what is not sublime in the *Enquiry* through the distinction he draws between the horse in *The book of Job* that "swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage" (60) and an ordinary work horse; Freud's seminal work on the case of a young child's phobia of horses—seemingly precipitated by his witnessing the collapse and death of a carriage horse in the street—as a springboard for the Oedipus Complex ("Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy," 1909); Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming horse" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980 / trans. 1988), in which they theorize affective, as opposed to representational, thinking through revisionary work on Freud's case study of this child and his equinophobia; the association of Nietzsche's mental collapse with his profound sense of identification with and love for a badly abused horse on the streets of Turin; and Kant's own suggestion that the horse comes closer than most other non-human entities to becoming—or at least having the potential to become—an object of respect (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788). There is the anguished and haunting opening scene of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), in which Raskolnikov dreams of an old working horse being badly beaten on the streets and whose death disturbs and confounds his assailant; and another haunting and rending scene in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) in which the Durbyfield family's only horse, Prince, accidentally wanders to the wrong side of the road in the middle of the night on the way to market with his sleepy child guides and is impaled by a swiftly moving mail cart, so that Tess and her small brother must watch him bleed to death by the light of dawn.

20. Robert J. Griffin has recently drawn attention to an episode of *The Prelude* he calls "Wordsworth's horse" that was written in 1804 but remained in manuscript (MS. W).[9] This episode is admittedly nowhere near the center of Wordsworth studies, but as he shows it has been noticed by Mary Jacobus and Geoffrey Hartman, both of whom are among the most influential readers of Wordsworth of our time and whose work has both formed and transformed the field of Romanticism itself. With the sparkle of such eminent attention as inspiration, Griffin works creatively and convincingly with the "horse" episode, showing the ways the passage is emblematic of the Wordsworths that develop out of Hartman's humanism and Jacobus's antihumanism respectively, and showing the episode's logical relation to the passage that eventually replaced it.

21. "Wordsworth's horse," as Griffin has so beautifully made visible through his work, does ultimately disappear from the poem, but yet there are others that remain. In fact, images of horses are entwined in central episodes of the published poem in all of its three major versions. This is most notably true in the "spots of time" episodes. In the first, there is the "pair of horsemen" (1799 I.302), the younger of whom, our poetic speaker, becomes frightened at being separated from his adult guide, which causes him to dismount and lead his horse inadvertently into a place that would haunt him through the course of his life; and, in the second episode, the boy's "impatient sight / Of those three horses" (1799, I.334-335) that he anticipated coming at any moment round the bend to bear him and his brothers home from school for Christmas, in which his "feverish" (332) impatience of sight for those animals—"I watched / With eyes intensely straining" (346-347)—would, again, haunt him throughout his life. Also there is that joyful episode of Book II of *The Prelude* in which our speaker recalls himself and his schoolmates compulsorily blowing the lion's share of their precious half-year allowances as often as possible to rent horses for a weekend, that they might once again "feel the motion of the galloping steed" (1805, II.103): "Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea / We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand (II.136-137).

22. Now to impressions. Imagine that the poetic image meets the photographic still. Terms of art: Tact. Suppleness. Impulsion. Lightness. Suspension. Collection. The spectacle: Brilliance. Gentleness. Finesse. Austerity. Serenity. Grace. Goals of practitioners: Conversation. Understanding. Mental and

Physical Enjoyment. Work. Accomplishment. Rhythm.

23. This is a composite image of the equine sport dressage.[10] With dressage, there are moments one can more easily catch with still photography than with the eye, though the eye becomes increasingly able to see them if it trains itself to do so - moments of suspension suspended in time. When the athletic power of the horse is fully in use and fully controlled, we call that power *suspension*, which is achieved through the combination of suppleness, impulsion, and collection. At such times, and in its engagement of various types of movements, the horse may be seen to be entirely off the ground, balanced in the air, a testament to the grace of highly disciplined power. I have in mind what is called the *collected trot*, which is ubiquitous to the sport, a rudiment learned at the earliest phase of training but which continues to be constitutive to training up through the very highest levels of competition and performance. Without the collected trot, you've got nothing in dressage. And yet, for all of its ordinariness within the discipline of the sport, in every single movement forward of this two-beat rhythm there is a magnificent and controlled suspension in the air when all four of the horse's legs are off the ground, in flight. Out of this early control will come some of the most marvelous feats of the sport—from the grandness in movement of the extended trot, in which the horse unleashes its power in the two-beat rhythm of the trot, covering vast space without changing tempo, to the controlled precision of the piaffe, in which it appears as though the horse dances in place, still in the same two-beat rhythm, still in the same tempo. This suspension at the heart of dressage's tempo produces a movement that is equally composed of halts and flights rather than purely a forward-moving sequence.[11] Efforts of training, by which I mean of continuous straining, might enable the eye to see it. Feeling it helps. Photographs help. As to the rider, it may seem (and is also supposed to seem) to an untutored eye that the rider is merely along for the ride, sitting effortlessly atop the horse during these moments of suspension and flight, but in fact over time one learns to see that in fact she is in constant and complex conversation with the horse. She is engaged with her heels, calves, thighs, buttocks, back, and hands in order that they together may accomplish such lightness as to hover above the earth together, and she is also absorbing the unbelievable physical power and motion of the horse into her own frame, which takes extraordinary physical strength.

24. Appropriately, the term "dressage" can be translated from French to mean, quite simply, "training." As master dressage trainer Nuno Oliveira (1925-1989) has encouraged us to do, we can think of dressage as fundamentally and constitutively pedagogical. Oliveira has written that dressage becomes art when perfect understanding between the rider and horse is reached. This level of understanding comes through pedagogical conversation that is initiated and controlled by the rider—"To practice equestrian art is to establish a conversation on a higher level with the horse; a dialogue of courtesy and finesse" (Oliveira 18), and, in response, the horse "will reply to the conversation . . . with his pedagogue" (19) —and which culminates in the capacity for both rider and horse to reach their full athletic potential. At the highest levels of the sport, the horse is able to command its own body at will and in human communion to do that which it could already do, but previously only inadvertently and by chance in moments of pure passion while loose in the field. It is a remarkable thing to witness, and something, moreover, that as a practitioner I feel certain the horses understand in these terms also. By this I mean that the dressage horse is precisely an uncoerced partner in a highly physically and mentally demanding sport that demands years and years of rigorous training[12] and that simply would not be mastered without consensus between partners that such training is desirable, pleasurable, even, as time goes on, increasingly formative of who they respectively take themselves and each other to be.

25. Perhaps it is true that at the most rudimentary level the conversation that erupts between a horse and rider endeavoring to practice the art and sport of dressage is begun by the rider, as Oliveira assumes is the case. Even so, it is a conversation that is held over time only if there is mutual consent. A horse that becomes resistant to a given rider is as ruinous to the partnership as a rider who becomes resistant to a horse. Furthermore, it is at least as often the case that the horse is more experienced than the rider than

that the rider is more experienced than the horse. In fact, if a horse reaches advanced levels of the sport, once that horse's competitive career comes to an end it will often be the case that that horse becomes a training horse—a horse that precisely teaches riders how to ride by being able to discern out of what will be broken and rough conversation what, nevertheless, a rider is trying to ask the horse to do. In such cases, though it might not be visibly obvious, particularly to an untrained eye, the horse is a highly skilled pedagogue engaging a human pupil. This fact puts into serious question any sense that it is the human being who is the pedagogue on the scene "guiding" the horse through the rigors of training. Such skill reminds me of an example Spivak once gave, in which she asks us to think about the difference between *knowing* on the one hand and *teaching* and *learning* on the other by asking us to think about the difference between describing the rules of a card game well and teaching someone how to play the card game well; between knowing how to play the card game well and playing to lose in order to teach. ("Trajectory of the Subaltern") In this way, the dressage horse is an example of a non-human pedagogue to be read alongside Kant's birds and perhaps to question and ultimately counter his larger sense that pedagogy is an enterprise that is engaged exclusively by and on the behalf of human being.[13]

26. Dressage is broken up into ten major levels beginning with "Training Level" and culminating in Olympic-level Grand Prix level. Each major level is broken up into four "tests" that practitioners must master before moving (incrementally) forward. As such, dressage the sport is composed of a rigorous and regimented series of rules and regulations so precise and yet so vast that they are reminiscent of Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*. Written in the guise of a pedagogical scenario, Longinus offers his treatise in the hopes that it will help to train his student in the art of the sublime. And yet, as we come to find, Longinus' treatise is no simple guidebook. In fact, what it has to teach has something to do precisely with the expectation of what is teachable through method, or science. I would suggest that dressage teaches us something similar. The dressage partnership is part human, part animal; I would suggest that the entanglement of the two is pervasive and constitutive. On the one hand, the goal of the sport is to bring the natural power and grace of the horse under disciplined control, which can perhaps be said of most athletes in most sports. On the other, the goal is to bring artfulness to the precipice of understanding—here recall the uncertainty with which one is always faced with the collected trot: is the horse suspended in motion, or is it moving forward?—and then beyond it. At its zenith dressage is an art rather than a sport, recalling Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*: "There is no science of the beautiful [das Schöne], but only critique, and there is no fine [schön] science, but only fine art" (*Critique of the Power of Judgement* 184). And further, as Oliveira has written, this art is, as he terms it, "fugitive," inaccessible beyond the occasion of its moment.[14]

27. In this way I would suggest that the art of dressage exemplifies very powerfully what Spivak considers to be Imagination's greatest lesson, which is that it fails to turn the sublime object it encounters into a body of knowledge. The pedagogical sublime is a sublime that precisely produces resonance rather than knowledge, practice rather than mastery, and that through rigorous and open-ended training that cannot be reduced either merely to "teaching" or "learning" but is also at key moments one, the other, and both. The result of the horse-rider partnership is to resonate with, but not to know, the sublime other. This encounter of horse and rider, which prioritizes neither as pedagogue nor pupil, which demands conversation—that is to say resonance—in on-going training, is an incarnation of what I take to be Spivak's ethics. It opens its practitioners, and its spectators, up to the possibility of "an imaginative exercise in experiencing the impossible—stepping into the space of the other" ("Terror" 94).

28. And so now to return to Wordsworth's horses. Again, while the fact of their presence in the passages has not been an influential preoccupation, the horses of the "spots of time" episodes are nevertheless present in some of the most influential passages of Wordsworth's poetry. Here at more length is the second episode:

One Christmas-time,
The day before the holidays began,
Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth
Into the fields, impatient for the sight
Of those three horses which should bear us home,
My brothers and myself. There was a crag,
An eminence, which from the meeting-point
Of two highways ascending overlooked
At least a long half-mile of those two roads,
By each of which the expected steeds might come -
The choice uncertain. Thither I repaired
Up to the highest summit. T'was a day
Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass
I sate half sheltered by a naked wall.
Upon my right hand was a single sheep,
A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
Those two companions at my side, I watched
With eyes intensely straining, as the mist
Gave intermitting prospects of the wood
And plain beneath. (1799, I.330-3439)

The question of whether time in this passage is sublime or traumatic is one that the work of Hartman and Jacobus together forcefully put to us. What I will say on this occasion is only that this passage puts time, ideas of the sublime, and education into relation, and the lesson that is the outcome of that entanglement is one precipitated by the straining to see horses. The boy's straining takes the form of searching the landscape for what he expects at every moment to see: the three horses coming to bear him and his brothers home. This scene, one numerously repeated in *The Prelude*, and which helps to shape the poem, is a scene of education. Often understood as lessons on the tyranny of the eye, in such episodes the eye looks with an unguarded expectation for what it will see, and in this particular case also *when* it will see, only to be chastised and disappointed, and eventually admonished by the at once gentle and at once stern pedagogues (of) nature, and then finally also rewarded for being a good student once that tyranny is understood and mediated if not expelled.

29. Now finally, I wish to conjure lessons of my own most memorable training, in which my teacher often modeled for me a practice of thinking characterized by a flexibility of imagination that I perceived both then and now would haunt me all my life, both because I knew then and know still that it, and he, is inimitable, and because I shall always strive to achieve that simile with a difference that figures, or bears a trace of, this training. The result of this present conjuring draws into clear relief, too, the fact that, as in *The Prelude* itself, the figure of the trainer, the pedagogue, the guide, is almost entirely spectral, both here, in the example I have offered, despite or perhaps because of the haunting every-day memories of a triad of coaches speaking to me almost constantly from the side as I trained over fifteen years in that sport, or of the equally haunting memories of reading *The Prelude* with my intellectual teacher over seven years of graduate training. This spectral figure of the teacher, not just here but throughout the pages of this issue, is a haunting reminder of the remarkable claim that Kant makes near the conclusion of the first Critique, which is that philosophy can never be learned. He writes, "We cannot learn philosophy—it does not exist; if it does, where is it, who possesses it, and how shall we know it?" We can only learn to philosophize" (*Critique of Pure Reason* 507).[15] Derrida for one responds by arguing that "philosophy eludes teaching, while philosophizing requires it, requires endlessly and only teaching" (60). And as Derrida goes on to say, we have yet to take the measure of "the institutional consequences from this . . . double bind that knots itself around the *sublime* body of the teacher of philosophizing, of his evident and unavoidable absence. For in his very withdrawal, he

remains unavoidable" (Derrida 62; emphasis mine). Perhaps, ultimately, and the pages of this issue will be suggestive in this regard through figurations both of presence, absence, and ghostliness, it is at the sublime body of the teacher where the sublime and education cross most consequentially.[16]

30. And so I conclude with a meditation inspired by the haunt of my sublime pedagogue.[17] Consider the possibilities that manifest when we subject the spot of time passage above to the artful rearrangements that ensue from a thought experiment, when, for example, we substitute "I watched / With eyes intensely straining" to "I watched / With eyes intensely *training*"? Taking into consideration this essay's meditation on training, and in line with a possible Wordsworth intimated by the very conversations between education and the sublime that this issue has taken it as its goal to generate, I would suggest that the emergent model is one of looking to learn, as opposed to learning to look, and that the effect is the difference between coercive and uncoercive education, which, in this case, would also be to say the effect of a pedagogical sublime. It is a critical spirit bent on theorizing a sublimely uncoercive pedagogy that unifies, however variously, the essays collected in this volume.

Notes

I wish to express my gratitude to the numerous individuals who have helped me with the work of this special issue. First and foremost, I thank the contributors; it has been a profound honor and privilege to work with each of them over the two years it has taken to complete this issue. Thanks to Laura Mandel, who helped to inspire this project, and to Steve Jones, who has been a kind and supportive general editor at Praxis. Thanks also to Stephen M. Barber, Alexandra Cook, and Bohun B. Kinloch III for their generous attention to this work as readers and critical interlocutors. Thanks finally to Mary Cappello, who invited me to give this essay as a public lecture in the University of Rhode Island Faculty Colloquium series in spring 2010, where I received excellent support, feedback, and suggestions. I would like to dedicate this issue to those who have trained me: the dressage and three-day eventing coaches of my past as a competitive rider—Karen Ball, David Collins, and Eike von Veltheim—and my academic mentors, Julie A. Carlson, Jeffrey N. Cox, and Alan Liu.

1 I would like to extend my gratitude to the students of my fall 2008 graduate seminar *Romantic Landscape* at the University of Rhode Island for discussions about the intersections of the Romantic sublime and pedagogy that were not only a great pleasure but were also useful to my work here: Rebekah Greene, Rosaleen Greene-Smith, Benjamin Hagen, Eva Jones, Sarah Maitland, Sara Murphy, and Maximilian Orsini.

2 I refer most specifically to the drowned man episode of *The Prelude*, which has long been associated with the schoolmaster James Jackson, who taught at the neighboring village of Sawrey, and who was drowned on June 18, 1779 while bathing in Esthwaite Lake.

3 *Lectures on Pedagogy* is an artifact produced over the course of a decade (1776-1787) during which Kant taught a required course on practical pedagogy as a member of the philosophy faculty at the University of Königsberg. It is now collected in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* under *Anthropology, History, and Education* (Eds. Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden. Trans. Robert B. Louden. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). As the translator explains in an introductory note, Kant had offered his many teaching notes for this class to his younger colleague, Friedrich Theodor Rink, who first published them, and whose edition (much as it is impossible to know where Kant's agency might end and Rink's begins) has largely determined all future editions of the piece, including this most recent one.

4 As she makes clear here and elsewhere, Spivak's conception of imagination is diametrically opposed to sympathetic identification, in which imaginative work is intent to produce affinity and correspondence between the imagining self and its other(s) by learning to read the other as "like" the self, which causes, inadvertently or otherwise, an occlusion or negation of the unknown aspects of the other which had

heretofore posed severe epistemological anxiety, contempt, indifference, or a combination of those responses. For an alternative, Spivak turns to the poetry of Wordsworth, particularly *Lyrical Ballads*, which she sees as modeling a "risky othering of the self" (*In Other Asias* 267) that precisely avoids sentimentality.

5 For critical insight on the concept of example in literary criticism more generally, see Ian Balfour's essay entitled "The Gift of Example: Derrida and the Origins of the Eighteenth Century" (*Eighteenth Century Studies*, 40.3 2007, pp. 467-472).

6 Paul de Man, "Time and History in Wordsworth" page 79, from *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers.* Ed. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, and Andrzej Warminski. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.

7 Geoffrey Shepherd suggests in an editorial note that "homo" and "equus" were familiar examples used to embellish the more abstract concepts of "A" and "B" in Scholastic argumentation. His note reads as follows: "Cp. the similar wish expressed by one of Crato's pupils in logic in De disciplina scholarium, PL 64, col. 1230 (a favourite medieval text long ascribed to Boethius but probably of 13th c. composition). Homo and equus were used as fixed terms in the syllogisms of medieval logic" (144-145).

8 I would like to thank Travis D. Williams for an illuminating discussion over this example as well as for bringing it to my attention when I offered this essay as a public lecture at the University of Rhode Island Faculty Colloquium Series in February 2010.

9 The passage to which Griffin refers is as follows:

> One evening, walking in the public way,
> A peasant of the valley where I dwelt
> Being my chance companion, he stopped short
> And pointed to an object full in view
> At a small distance. 'Twas a horse, that stood
> Alone upon a little breast of ground
> With a clear silver moonlight sky behind.
> With one leg from the ground the creature stood,
> Insensible and still; breath, motion gone,
> Mane, ears, and tail, as lifeless as the trunk
> That had no stir of breath. We paused awhile
> In pleasure of the sight, and left him there,
> With all his functions silently sealed up,
> Like an amphibious work of Nature's hand,
> A borderer dwelling betwixt life and death,
> A living statue or a statued life. (draft material MS. W, pg. 498 Norton Critical Edition of *The Prelude*)

10 Classical dressage is an Olympic sport the art of which has been practiced for hundreds of years and some movements of which can be traced to ancient equine pedagogy largely bent on war training, specifically the treatise *On Horsemanship* (350 B.C.) by Xenophon, in which he argued that horses must not be used as tools and must be loved as partners rather than forced to obey through constraint. Dressage reached the artistic zenith that still determines the way we practice the sport today during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at various courts of Western Europe, including those of Maria Teresa and of Louis XIV through Louis the XVI at Versailles.

11 The following Grand Prix musical freestyle performance of the horse/rider pair Moorland Totilas and

Edward Gal at a Dutch competition in 2009 is a brilliant example not only of the art and sport of dressage generally but of the collected trot in particular: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvUDAlsLo20

12 It takes a single horse and rider on average a decade to reach the level of accomplishment required to compete in Grand Prix Olympic-level competition.

13 There are two formal qualities of Kant's example worth reflecting upon as one reflects on the comparison of the case of the horse I offer here with Kant's birds. The first, which I have explored above, is exclusivity. Kant's birds are claimed to be a sole exception and so bear the weight of that claim. The second is the almost violent brevity of Kant's bird example, to which I hope to have drawn attention through the elaborate quality of the horse example in relation to it.

14 Oliveira writes, "once the horse is dead, nothing, not even films, can reproduce the sensation felt when the horse is seen in movement. . . . After the horse is no more, only those who have admired him keep a remembrance of his quality in their hearts, which is gradually effaced by Time, and others who have not seen him know him only by romanticized tales, recounted, and sometimes embroidered, by those who have truly loved him" (118).

15 The translation of this passage changes slightly from one edition to another. In the Cambridge edition by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (1999), it reads, "one cannot learn any philosophy; for where is it, who has possession of it, and by what can it be recognized? One can only learn to philosophize" (695). In the Doubleday edition edited by F. Max Muiller (1966), it reads, "Of all the sciences of reason (*a priori*), therefore, mathematics alone can be learnt, but philosophy (unless it be historically) never; with regard to reason we can at most learn to *philosophize*"(533).

16 David Clark has been formative in my thinking on the role of the teacher in relation to the key concepts of this issue, the sublime and education; for that and for all of his wisdom and erudition from which I have had opportunity to benefit since I met him and in his written work long before that, I offer thanks.

17 I refer here to Alan Liu, my dissertation advisor, whose recent book *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database* (2008) gives numerous examples of a strategy of thought experimentation that permeates his writings and his pedagogy. I think with especial fondness of a graduate seminar that Alan taught in the winter of 2000 entitled *The Culture of Information*, in which he encouraged all of us to make presentations as thought experiments and which produced the most rigorous and yet playful interdisciplinary work in which I have ever had the pleasure to take part and from which I learned what type of teacher I myself aspire to be.

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The Sublime and Education

Letter on an Aestheticist Education

Forest Pyle, University of Oregon

10 August 2008

Dear Professor Jones,

1. You have asked me to submit the results of my inquiry on the relationship between education and the sublime; and I am both moved and challenged by the invitation. The challenges of such an undertaking are, of course, considerable: on the face of it, nothing seems less "teachable" than the sublime. This is not to say that the writings of Longinus or Burke or Kant, for all their considerable difficulty, are not eminently teachable. And closer to us, the texts of Weiskel or Hertz or de Man remain indispensable not only to the scholarship of Romanticism but to its instruction as well. Moreover, the literature of the sublime–literary representations of the sublime as well as the literature that achieves sublimity–has long claimed a privileged position in the Romantic canon. And I would side with those who contend that, structurally speaking, the Romantic sublime remains the limit case for discourses of infinitude. Thus, in theory, the sublime should be no more or less challenging to teach than other topics in philosophical aesthetics.

2. But there is an important difference, of course, between teaching theories or representations of the sublime and teaching the aesthetic *experience* we judge to be sublime. The former can be presented with the critical rigor afforded to other forms of literary studies, such as narratology, literary history, or even the analysis of tropes and figures. But with the *experience* of the sublime, it is impossible to determine whether or not one can succeed in its teaching, since no examination could be devised to demonstrate that success short of that which could replicate the experience. Nor is it clear whether it would be pedagogically responsible to *profess* the sublime, even if we knew how to do such a thing. A sublime *experience*, after all, would be "pre-critical," and what pedagogy worthy of the name would aspire to that?

3. At the same time, I have always felt that there was something sterile and punitive—puritanical even—about a critical knowledge of the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime which disallows access to their sensory manifestations. Even Schiller declared that it was necessary for "the understanding to destroy the objects of the inner sense before it can appropriate them;" but he was referring to the task of the philosopher and not the teacher. So, I will confess that in the pragmatic situation of instruction I have found myself forced back onto the force of examples. In the first instance, these are examples drawn not from Romantic literature or culture but–and this assumes for the moment that such experiences and judgments are not historically restricted–from cognate versions in more contemporary literature, film, music, painting. In other words, one might not only present Beethoven's *Grosse Fugue* or Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* to illustrate and, indeed, to *prompt* the feelings of the sublime, but John Coltrane's live 1967 recording in Stockholm of "My Favorite Things," or the original Velvet Underground studio version of "Heroin," or Patti Smith's "Horses," or Cormac McCarthy's depiction of the Comanche attack on an American military expedition in *Blood Meridian*, or the account of Port's death in Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky*, or Jorie Graham's "What the End is For," or Cy Twombly's sprawling "Say Goodbye, Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor," or Maria Falconetti's ecstatic performance in Carl Dreyer's *Passion of Jean D'Arc*, or the dizzying entirety of Wong Kar-Wei's *2046*.

4. I list a handful of examples over which I claim at least minimal classroom competence and through which I have achieved modest classroom success in order to stress both the pedagogical possibilities and dead-ends posed by an individual's catalogue of sublime judgments. On the one hand, these examples fulfill an important pedagogical function in the teaching of the sublime insofar as they represent formally and thematically the aesthetic judgment they elicit. *But elicit for whom?* The examples I have cited also demonstrate how quickly this can deteriorate into an idiosyncratic "playlist," more an index of individual "taste" (in the more restricted, colloquial, Nic Hornsby sense of that term) than a foray into the experience of the sublime. On the other hand, when in the classroom we point out the canonical examples of the natural scenes that have been said to evoke the sublime from Longinus and Lucretius through Kant and the Romantics—"Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks," "thunderclouds piled up to the vault of heaven," "volcanoes in their violence of destruction," the boundless ocean," etc.—we effectively dispense with the singularity of the aesthetic experience that is supposed to accompany such judgments. "There are numberless beautiful things in nature," says Kant, "about which we can assume and even expect, without being widely mistaken, the harmony of everyone's judgment with our own. But in respect of our judgment upon the sublime in nature, we cannot promise ourselves so easily the accordance of others" (104). Perhaps nowhere more than in the pedagogical situation does the insistent aporia which no aesthetic judgment, sublime or otherwise, can elude–namely, the aporia between singularity and universal communicability–assert itself most dramatically. And is it not the case that universal communicability is as much the premise as the goal of a democratic education? Is Kant not thinking pedagogically in the *Third Critique* when he immediately goes on to suggest that "a far greater culture, as well of the aesthetical judgment as of the cognitive faculties which lie at its basis, seems requisite in order to be able to pass judgment on this peculiarity of natural objects [i.e. their sublimity]" (104)?

5. Can we teach the sublime without working to identify, if not cultivate, the capacities of aesthetic discrimination in our students and ourselves? Can it be achieved without the force of example? It is certainly the case that my efforts in the classroom to identify exemplary contemporary works of art which elicit the *experience* of the sublime deliver such scenes of instruction to the diexis of distinction: I point out works which appear to achieve the status of the sublime by pointing *at* them. And I point at as many of them as possible in order that at least one of them will point out for my students what occurs in the sublime. As such, this form of exercise might serve as a prologue to a more sustained inquiry of those texts that one need not simply point out and point at, but where one can engage the workings–the formal and rhetorical components, as it were—of a sublime experience and judgment. They might best serve, in other words, as a prologue to reading. In the particular literary tradition which we profess, I know of no text which better invites this inquiry–what we might call a reading that opens onto a teaching—than one of the extraordinary poems Percy Shelley wrote during the summer of 1816, "Mont Blanc." And I wonder whether it is the Kantian impulse that prompts me to teach "Mont Blanc" alongside and by way of comparison with "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," that other great poem on the workings of the aesthetic written during that decisive summer?

September 10

6. If the "Hymn" sets up the problem of the sublime by teaching us how beauty works, it does so in the beginning through its own catalogue of examples, by pointing out five instances of its effects or, more precisely, its likenesses ("moonbeams," "hues and harmonies of evening," "clouds in starlight widely spread," "memory of music fled," and, finally, "aught" itself).

> The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen amongst us,—visiting

This various world with as inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.–
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
It visits with inconstant glance
Each human heart and countenance:
Like hues and harmonies of evening,—
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,—
Like memory of music fled,—
Like aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery. (1-12)

But what do we learn from these examples? If Shelley's poem teaches us to read the examples it points at, we learn *nothing*. Beauty's very "spirit" is its transience, its fleeting impermanence; its rhetorical mode is that of the simile. The "awful shadow" of the spirit of "BEAUTY" "visits" us and leaves us; what these visitations leave us—at least those of us who reside in this "dim vast vale of tears"—is the vacancy and desolation of fugitive semblances which we recognize only in their passing. If the first four of these similes convey sensory manifestations–what we might characterize as the experience of the blur or the trace–the last of them belongs to a different register entirely. The shadow of beauty's spirit comes and goes "Like aught that for its grace may be / Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery" (11-12), in other words, like *anything* that possesses beauty's own "grace" and "mystery," the very features which make it dear and dearer. Beauty's transitivity reveals itself in this collusion of tenor and vehicle, leaving us with this concluding "aught," this anything whatsoever, which is also nothing in particular. Both the "Power" of Beauty and its "awful shadow" remain "unseen amongst us": they are nothing we could point at.

7. If the mediations and complexities of these lines are scarcely unusual for Shelley, the extent of their disarticulations is unexpected in a poem which sounds so lovely. If beauty's "light alone" (32) "Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream" (36)–grace and truth as gifts bestowed upon the world by beauty–this happens "like" "music by the night wind sent / Through strings of some still instrument" (33-34). This is the poem's aesthetics and its poetics: indeed, it is its *aestheticist* poetics. The poem teaches us the charms and seductions of the aesthetic experience which, through the manifold instances of its appearance, it tries to name and deliver. In an essay called "'Frail Spells: Shelley and the Irony of Exile," I suggest that the *Hymn's* undoing of the "frail spells" of "God and ghosts and Heaven" relies upon the quasi-theological charms of the aesthetic, particularly given the conversion experience "in which the eruption of an ecstatic 'shriek'– 'I shrieked and clasped my hands in extasy'–prompts the declaration of poetic vows." And while Shelley's "spirit of Beauty" is forever elusive as presence, it is nonetheless a "Power," a force which *insists*. And it is the insistence, even the magnitude of this force that makes the distinctions between theology and aesthetics difficult to maintain.

8. But consider in this context what one of our own most rigorous contemporary theologians of the beautiful, David Bentley Hart, has to say on what beauty means:

> Whatever "beauty" means is grasped only by analogy, by constant exposure to countless instances of its advent, and through constant and continuous revision (this because, in theological terms, God is the "primary analogate" to whom beauty is ascribed); and in the more radically ontological sense, that beauty is not some property discretely inherent in particular objects, but indwells the analogical relationship of all thing. (18)

Hart says that this is what "'beauty' *means*," and yet I think it is more to the point of his own argument to say that this is what and how beauty *teaches*: by the making of analogies, "by constant exposure to countless *instances* of its advent," beauty instructs us about the "primary analogate," what Hopkins

would call "God's better beauty, grace." If for the Shelley of the "Hymn," "beauty" is also "grasped only by analogy," by "countless instances of its advent," the *radicality* of Shelley's conception of beauty is that the countless instances of its advent occur in likeness without "primary analogate," which would be but another of Shelley's "frail spells." The teaching of beauty in the "Hymn" is the teaching of an aestheticism.

9. If the poem teaches us that lesson, it does so in part because nestled within the hymn is the autobiography of an aesthetic education: it is an education of beauty which, once learned, makes this poet's beautiful singing possible. The story is told in the fifth and sixth stanzas of the hymn as the poem introduces its speaker and moves to the first person and, temporarily, to the past tense. It is at first what in "On Life" Shelley describes as an "education of error"; but here the teaching that must be unlearned is more noxious than mere error. Indeed, it qualifies as *superstition*: "I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed; / I was not heard–I saw them not–" (53-54). Lucretius would have identified and celebrated this process as the freeing of the mind "from the narrow bonds of religion," those "frail spells" *dispelled* by the hymn itself. It is in the resulting blankness, the vacancy produced by this unlearning, that the activity of thought ("musing deeply on the lot / Of life" (55-56) at just the right moment ("at that sweet time when winds are wooing / All vital things" (56-57) prepares the poet for the event of the "sudden" and decisive "falling" of the "shadow" of beauty.

10. Alain Badiou would no doubt say that this narrative of beauty's descent is formally and thematically nothing more than the "frail" but persistent "spell" of romanticism itself. It is, after all, this very romanticism from which Badiou seeks at last to deliver *us* in order for philosophy to bestow its gift of truth:

> What is romanticism? . . . Art is the descent of the infinity of the Ideal into the finitude of the work. The artist, elevated by genius, is the sacrificial medium of this descent. This is a transposition of the Christian schema of the incarnation: the genius lends Spirit the forms it has mastered so that the people may recognize its own spiritual infinitude in the finitude of the work. Since in the end it's the work that bears witness to the incarnation of the infinite, romanticism cannot avoid making the work sacred… What we are calling "romanticism" is an aesthetic religion. (Cent 154).[1]

Is this "aesthetic religion" but another name for aestheticism? Can a *hymn* sung to the "Spirit of BEAUTY" "avoid making the work sacred"? Shelley's poem seems to confirm Badiou's account readily enough when, in the sixth stanza, the speaker recounts the "vows" he made to beauty, the solemn promise and engagement to devote himself to a life guided by the forms and figures, the shadows and phantoms of beauty: "I vowed that I would dedicate my powers / To thee and thine" (61-62). And as the poem re-establishes itself in the present tense, it performs in the middle of its sixth stanza a passionate and tearful renewal of that vow, echoing while displacing the earlier "call" "on poisonous names":

> With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
> I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
> Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
> Of studious zeal or love's delight
> Outwatched with me the envious night–
> They know that never joy illumed my brow
> Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
> This world from its dark slavery,
> That thou–O awful LOVELINESS,
> Wouldst give what'er these words cannot express. (64-72).

11. Given the poem's overt deployment of what Badiou calls the "Christian schema," I doubt that Shelley's painstaking discrimination between the nature and the effects of "the phantoms of a thousand hours" and the "poisonous names with which our youth is fed" would satisfy the French philosopher that the performance of this hymn to "O awful LOVELINESS" constitutes anything more than the positing of an "aesthetic religion." But for the topic at hand it is certainly worth noting that Shelley's speaker stresses how the phantoms he addresses have "outwatched" with him "the envious night" "in visioned bowers / Of *studious* zeal or love's delight," "visioned bowers" of love or learning. These are phantoms–not unlike those "glorious phantoms" promised by "England in 1819"–whose knowledge points the way not only to beauty but to its inherent "link" or "bond" with the hope of freedom from "dark slavery." To those who join Shelley in opposing what in another context he identified as "the advocates of injustice and superstition," the "worship" of the spirit of beauty and its sensory manifestations ("every form containing thee") spells for "all human kind" the binding hope of universal love.

12. At Chickering Hall in New York, on January 9, 1882, Oscar Wilde delivered his first public lecture in the United States to a packed house, at least some of which must have been looking on with "studious zeal and love's delight." Wilde titled the lecture "The English Renaissance of Art," the term he bestowed on what he was identifying as "our romantic movement." "I call it our English Renaissance," says Wilde, "because it is indeed a new birth of man, like the great Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, in its desire for a more gracious and comely way of life, its passion for beauty, new forms of art, new intellectual and imaginative enjoyments" (2). If Wilde believes this new English Renaissance to be "a new birth of man," it is not what we would identify these days as the "dominant" or "hegemonic" cultural tradition; it is, rather, much closer to what we would call "counter-cultural," this "romantic movement" which *begins* with Shelley and Keats and which claims Wilde as one of its own. It is "ours," he declares to this audience of potential initiates: it belongs to those aesthetic conspirators who find themselves hailed as one of "ours." Wilde judges "our romantic movement" to be that which finds its true measure in the "great Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century" in part "because it is our most recent expression of beauty" (2)–the site of beauty's own most contemporary manifestation–and in part "because it is the source for what he characterizes as "the two most vital tendencies of the nineteenth century":

> The two most vital tendencies of the nineteenth century–the democratic and pantheistic tendency and the tendency to value life for the sake of art–found their most complete and perfect utterance in the poetry of Shelley and Keats who, to the blind eyes of their own time, seemed to be as wanderers in the wilderness, preachers of vague or unreal things. (23)

Not only are aestheticism and democracy the "two most vital tendencies" of the age, they are "uttered" in their "most complete and perfect" form by the poems of Shelley and of Keats, these animating but unapprehended "spirits" of their own age who teach as "wanderers in the wilderness, preachers of vague or unreal things."

13. With these last phrases, Wilde might as well have been characterizing himself as he embarked on his lecture tour of America, "wandering" westward with his aesthetic teaching of the "vague or unreal thing" of beauty itself. Wilde undertakes to teach us what Shelley has taught him: "Love art and all the things will be given to you." Dedicate yourself solely to "awful LOVELINESS," make good on your vows to beauty in all of its forms, and the hope of freedom will come to you as your gift. But if in Shelley as in Wilde beauty gives us an aestheticist education, can the same be said for the sublime? Just what does the mountain teach?

14. When I assign "Mont Blanc" to my students, I find that it is the poem's formal, rhetorical, and epistemological difficulty that makes it so "teachable," particularly when we can be equipped with the resources of the extraordinary scholarship that has been bestowed on us by such distinguished Romanticists as William Keach, or Jerrold Hogle, or, above all, Earl Wasserman. Whether we teach the poem as a paradigmatic example of the attempt to represent in poetic language an object which presents itself as sublime, or as an epistemological riddle which tests the limits of skepticism, or as an ethico-poetic engagement with the otherness of materiality, or as the performance of a radical experimentation in form and figure, or as *all of the above and all at the same time,* "Mont Blanc" is likely to elicit in every serious teacher as well as student a "pleasure" that emerges only indirectly and only by way of the alternating feelings of attraction and repulsion. The agitation, the restlessness that the poem both invokes and provokes in students and teachers alike is best described as a species of negative and negating—or, closer to Shelley's idiom, "vacating"—pleasure which will result in something like sheer astonishment if not deep admiration. In other words, we are likely to experience and judge the poem to be "sublime." Try as one might to resist it (and there are many good ideological if not pedagogical reasons *to* try), I cannot imagine a genuine engagement with the poem which can ultimately escape the problematic of the sublime, even if that critical tradition is not explicitly engaged and even if the word "sublime" never appears as such. Indeed, Shelley's poem does not merely invoke or refer to the sublime: it *insists* upon it.

15. But exactly *where* is the sublime in the poem? Is it Mont Blanc itself, not referred to by name until the middle of part III, where "far, far above, piercing the infinite sky," it "appears,—still, snowy, and serene" (60-61)? Is it "the everlasting universe of things" with which the poem opens? Is it the "Power"—what Kant calls *Macht* —that appears three times in the poem, in the first instance as semblance, "in likeness of the Arve"(16)? Is it that abstract force which stands removed from the mutability of natural existence and human history, the "Power" which "dwells apart in its tranquility / Remote, serene, and inaccessible" (96-97)? Is this same "Power" made into a more or less viable candidate for sublimity when we note that in the version of the poem included in the Scrope Davies Notebook, Shelley actually wrote "sublime" before amending it to "serene" when preparing it for publication? Is the sublime located in the poem's final section, where power is no longer rendered "in likeness" or abstraction but deictically as the defining feature or property of the mountain: "Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there" (127)? Is it "there" in the poem, where the speaker points at the gleaming to the place he cannot see ("none beholds them there"), that power finds "its home," a "there" which can never be a *here* (11.132, 136)?

16. Of course, the word "sublime" does appear once in the final version of the poem published in *The History of a Six Weeks' Tour* where it is used as an adjective to describe the feeling of a "trance" brought on by the experience of gazing not at the mountain but at the "Ravine of Arve":

> Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
> Thou art the path of that unresting sound–
> Dizzy Ravine! And when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate phantasy,
> My own, my human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around; (32-40)

This lone explicit invocation of the condition of sublimity was a late addition. In the Scrope Davies

Notebook, Shelley's speaker seems "as in a vision deep & strange"; and Michael O'Neill seems quite right when he says that "'vision' may seem profounder than 'trance,' but 'sublime' claims to have access to a quality of apprehension not aimed at by 'deep'" (619). Visions and trances are often synonymous for Shelley–explicitly so at the beginning of *The Triumph of Life*, for instance–and the substitution of "sublime" for "deep" does elevate what O'Neill carefully calls the "quality of apprehension" invoked by the experience. And in a Kantian register, when Shelley's speaker emphatically and apostrophically attributes dizziness to the ravine, he allegorizes (performs *and* demonstrates) the "subreption" which is constitutive of a judgment of the sublime: "the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption" (96). Moreover, as the passage follows the "path of that unresting sound," that "ceaseless motion" from ravine to mind, it seems yet again to offer an instructional guide to Kant's account of the sublime:

> The mind feels itself *set in motion* [*bewegt*] in the representation of the sublime in nature; whereas in the aesthetic judgment upon what is beautiful therein it is *restful* contemplation. This movement … may be compared with a vibration, i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction produced by one and the same Object. The point of excess for the imagination . . . is like an abyss in which it fears to lose itself. (97)

I would venture both here and in the classroom that Kant's representations of the sublime are not merely those which "Mont Blanc" is also representing "as the poets do," but that Kant gives us both a name for and an account of the aesthetic experience that is taking place in the poem itself.

17. Michael Palmer, perhaps the most Shelleyan poet of our generation, has described how for the poets of his own generation, "Shelley was a poet under several erasures," most immediately the "prohibitions of the modernists": "Shelley's difficult and audacious juxtaposing of (at his best) precise physical detail with philosophical rumination ran counter to the entire economy of modernism" (201). I know of no reader to have surpassed Earl Wasserman in pointing out and working through the philosophical questions and traditions dramatized in and by "Mont Blanc." Wasserman not only taught generations of readers schooled on the "prohibitions of the modernists" to take Shelley seriously as a poet; he taught them *how* to understand the "difficult and audacious juxtaposition" of "precise physical detail with philosophical rumination" and nowhere more powerfully than in his account of what he calls the "artistry" and "poetic intensity" of "Mont Blanc." We recall, of course, that Wasserman takes the title of *The Subtler Language* from Shelley's own account in *The Revolt of Islam* of the effects of "a subtler language within language wrought," a poetic capacity Wasserman links to Shelley's project of *producing* "a poetic reality that would unfold to him the further imaginative truths it implies" (12). This instructs us not merely to appreciate Shelley as a "serious" poet–"of sufficient seriousness and scope as to touch on ontological concerns" (10)–but to discern how Shelley's own "subtler language" engages and in fact *advances* the very nature of the philosophical debate in epistemology, ontology, and—I would add— aesthetics. For Wasserman, "Mont Blanc" "is the product of the poet's urge so to reconstitute his available language"—namely, Shelley's philosophic idealism— "that it will, not express, but inherently contain that philosophy and thereby open the otherwise closed doors to the dark corridors of thought that lie beyond ordinary conception" (208). Though Wasserman doesn't name it as such, this is a *sublime* undertaking; indeed, it is precisely this movement of an uncontainable thought which is the basis for Shelley's famous claim in the *Defense* that Francis Bacon be regarded as a poet:

> Lord Bacon was a poet. His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect; it is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the hearer's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy. (Shelley 514-515).

Students are as quick to point out the tropes of the sublime at work in that extraordinary description as I am to point to the sublime as a poetic effect, such as the one produced by "Mont Blanc."

18. The principal claim of my reading of the poem is a simple one, but I'm not aware that it has been made in this form. My argument is based upon the aesthetic experience produced by–and produced in–the poem: the first section of the poem *is* sublime; and its sublimity is registered thematically, formally, grammatically, rhetorically. The poetic aftermath of that sublimity, the final hundred lines of the poem, demonstrates not only that Shelley is resisting the theological position he understood in Coleridge–that the sublimity of the mountain sings the presence of God, that "primary analogate" of worldly sublimity–but that even Mont Blanc itself is *not* the object by which the sublime is represented. Rather, Shelley's poem gives us and its speaker the sublimity of poetic language itself, the *experience* of that sublimity in the force and movement of lines which not only tell us about the porous reciprocality of subject and object but which make that happen in poetry.

    The everlasting universe of things
    Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
    Now dark–now glittering–now reflecting gloom–
    Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
    The source of human thought its tribute brings
    Of water,—as with a sound but half its own,
    Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
    In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
    Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
    Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
    Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves. (1-11)

    Wasserman can help us tease out the grammatical and philosophical meanings of those opening lines and demonstrate the poetic "artistry" by which he exceeds his philosophical debts; but the immediate experience of the language itself is that of a precision of description that nonetheless turns itself into almost sheer abstraction. The lines take place in a present tense which cannot exist as such in any here or now except as language and as a *poetic* language whose "strain" "distends" the "circumference" of the reader's mind. Infinite vastness not only "flows through the mind" but possesses "waves" which it "rolls" in various forms of obscurity and aesthetic illumination and which takes this *sentence* impossibly through an adverbial clause to a place "where from secret springs / The source of human thought its tribute brings / Of waters . . ." (4-6). In advance of our attempts to make sense of these lines–epistemological, ontological, grammatical–we *watch* and apprehend the boldness of the opening line dividing and dissipating into mirrored and diffused images that are delivered to hidden, even impossible places. If Wasserman can help us with the philosophical *meaning* of the lines, I've always been struck by the way their aesthetic *effects* deliver us closest to what Roland Barthes called the "obtuse": a "third meaning," neither informational nor symbolic, that does not eliminate signification but postpones it in the adventure of the signifier. I suspect that the invocation of *this* Barthes in *this* context must sound outdated; but I know of no better way to approach how the opening lines of the poem enfold the reader in an experience for which meaning remains something like a perpetually receding horizon–the "source of human thought" which vanishes in the lines as anything we might understand or locate as "source"–toward which we hail and from which we turn away. The most fitting pictorial emblem for this poetic condition is another document of sublimity, Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, in which the shipwrecked figures in the top right corner of the painting enthusiastically hail the ship on the horizon, only to have the prospects of rescue give way in the canvas itself to those who have relinquished all hope and have given themselves over to the fate of the endless sea.

19. The poetic "subreption" by which the speaker attributes "dizziness" to the Ravine and judges that

experience to be like a "trance sublime and strange" signals a series of subreptions by which this initial poetic sublimity–the place where the sublime occurs–is ascribed first to the "Ravine of Arve" and subsequently to Mont Blanc, as if the poem itself must look down and up and down and up again to secure "fit" emblems for the representation of the sublime. Thus, the "thus thou": it opens part II, and it opens us onto the poetic aftermath of that sublime experience. In fact, the entire poem becomes a series of "thuses" struggling and failing to account for that initial poetic representation. Seen from this perspective, the final four sections of "Mont Blanc" are magnificent poetry and yet nothing more than a chronicle of the efforts to comprehend the poetic apprehensions generated from those opening eleven lines: perpetually failed analogies or broken similes, cancelled attempts to mythologize, narrativize, naturalize, and even philosophize that sublime poetic event. There is, for instance, the "giant brood of pines" which is represented as "clinging" (20) to the "Ravine of Arve" (12), "children of elder time" (21). There are the efforts to comprehend Mont Blanc "piercing the infinite sky" (60), its "appearance" (61) "far, far above" (60) its "subject mountains" (62) piled "around it" (63), "a desart peopled by storms alone" (67). There is "Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power" (103)–the slow work of glaciers–which "have piled . . . / A city of death, distinct with many a tower / And wall impregnable of beaming ice. / Yet not a city" (104-107). A city; no, not a city. This erasure of the complicated metaphor of human social architecture for the resolutely inhuman processes unfolding on the mountain merely makes explicit what the poem has been doing after its initial event: successively negating or "vacating" each trope of comprehension, each metaphor or simile or apostrophe or metonymy ventured in the poem. If, for instance, "likeness" occurs as often in "Mont Blanc" as it does in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," it does so in the former without *holding*, without sustaining similarity. The cumulative result of the poem is a series of unanswered questions which open onto another set of such questions, often implicit, sometimes explicit. The famous and powerful final question of the poem (which, one should add, even Wasserman could only interpret as rhetorical) is but the culmination of some of the decisive questions posed by "Mont Blanc," questions that get asked throughout Shelley's poetry: How to represent such an "aweful scene" atheologically? How and where does poetry come of this? How is this representation political? What is its relationship to Power?

20. The cumulative effect of these examples in the poem offers an entire syllabus of an "educations of error," a catalogue of rigorous critique and unrelenting unlearning. There are, however, two moments of affirmative instruction in the poem, two moments which might instruct us how to teach the poem's own failures to comprehend the sublimity it has produced. The first occurs straightforwardly enough: upon reaching the discovery that "Power dwells apart in its tranquility / Remote, serene, and inaccessible," the speaker points to that which is available solely to the senses, that which, demythologized and sheerly natural, teaches those who are attentive: "And *this*, the naked countenance of earth, / On which I gaze, even these primaeval mountains / Teach the adverting mind" (96-100). But the scene can only function as an example of affirmative instruction if we remain, impossibly, in the present tense of the present acts presented to us in these lines. Extracted from the poem's narrative and frozen into this pedagogical allegory, the lines actually teach us about the force of deixis, the linguistic power to insist on "*this*" and point at something as if it were there to behold. It's a useful lesson to learn, especially for reading Shelley's own poetry. But the genuinely "adverting mind" will quickly learn that this very lesson is yet another feature of an "education of error": not only is that "naked countenance of earth" a blank page upon which to write and erase our mythological or theological projections (the very next lines embark on the failed metaphor of the "city of death"), but that same "countenance" is not just an appearance to the senses but for Shelley a semblance or likeness, an aesthetic effect.

21. The second explicitly pedagogical moment in the poem occurs at the end of part III, the famously tricky lines in which the poem spells out the lessons to be learned from the "mysterious tongue" of "wilderness" and then explicitly addresses the mountain and its capacity to effect profound ethico-political change:

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (76-83)

Wasserman sees no essential difference between the "mysterious tongue" of "the wilderness" and the "voice" possessed by the "great Mountain": both teach us the truth of Power, that it is "an inexorable force man cannot command or control" and that it "has no human concerns" (228). The lesson to be learned from the tongue and voice of Power is the lesson of a relentless skepticism: "The skeptical doubt and the submission to the Power lead to no further truth, but merely destroy man's false conceptions of Power, expressed in the institutions man has constructed and called ultimate and compelling truths" (229). This is as compelling an account of Shelley's skepticism as we have; and it is fully consistent with the poet's own accounts in "On Life" of the task of the "Intellectual Philosophy." But this interpretation does not account for the shift in tone and figure as the lines move from the trope of "wilderness" as such to the address to *this* particular mountain, a shift which can be understood to indicate a meaningful disjunction between the Wordsworthian reverence offered by the former and the revolutionary political force of the latter. Indeed, if we imagine Shelley to be ignoring every lesson about the workings of prosopopeia that the poem teaches, we might read the final lines of this passage as an exhortation to the mountain itself: *Find your voice, Great Mountain!* Or, more to the point of the prospective and instructive form of the infinitive: *Use your voice, Great Mountain, to annul once and for all those fraudulent statutes that cause our world nothing but misery!* Of course, to suggest this is to imply that the speaker if not the poem has succumbed to the spell of the trope.

22. We might ignore the lessons that "Mont Blanc" teaches us about workings of tropes in general, and specifically about the epistemological and even ethical inability of any trope of comprehension to account for the apprehension of the sublime: they are, says the poem, "not understood / By all." After all, the knowledge to be gleaned from the rhetorical lesson of the "great Mountain's" "voice" is as unrelentingly ironic as it is vacating: the poem points explicitly at the failure of the trope its speaker deploys. What the "wise" "interpret," the "great" "make felt," and the "good" "deeply feel" is the obdurate refusal of the mute mountain to accommodate the voices and the voicings that will inevitably be ascribed to it. This is the poem's version of what I've been alluding to as what "On Life" presents as "an education of error": "it destroys error, and the roots of error. It leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy" (*Shelley* 507). If it is "too often the duty" of the *teacher* of "Mont Blanc," of Shelley, of the sublime "to leave a vacancy," it often seems too stringent a duty. Not even Wasserman can leave it at that. If the final lines of the poem offer us a paradigmatic example of what de Man identified as the "undecidability" between literal and rhetorical readings of three lines "whose grammatical structure is devoid of ambiguity," Wasserman makes the decision without hesitation: "the mode of the lines is a rhetorical question. . . . Silence and solitude, therefore, are decidedly not a vacancy . . . in the 'human mind's imaginings'" (240, 237).

23. It is the coupling of the poem's rhetorical power and its self-awareness that teaches us the limits of Wasserman's if not Shelley's skepticism. And it is the coupling of the poem's rhetorical power and its self-awareness that teaches us the limits of any *aestheticism* we might be eager to ascribe to Shelley in general and to this poem in particular. The final section of this poem begins by pointing up yet again at the mountain with that starkly glorious line: "Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there" (127). Following Wasserman, I have tracked the poem's various "gleamings" that lead to this final beholding. For Wasserman, this is the "'gleam' of the Power [that] is beyond and distinct from what

man calls 'light'": it is a "characterless transcendent light" (234-235). I regard this "gleaming" as the ineradicability of the aesthetic: not the "gleams of a remoter world" (49) which might *allude* to the aesthetic, but the power of an insistent aesthetic gleaming. Shelley understood that gleams could occur with a light that is either reflected or emitted. The de-theologizing impulses of the poem should prompt us to expect that the light which reaches us from the mountain would merely be a reflection. And yet, up there, on the mountain, "none beholds them" (132); rather, it is Mont Blanc itself that "yet gleams on high."

24. But even if this aesthetic reading of Shelley's mountain gleaming is plausible or teachable, it cannot answer the questions or fill the vacancies posed by the poem's last lines. In the poetic aftermath of the sublime, the gleaming may insist but it cannot solve.

November 4

25. *Expectantly the gaze of philosopher and citizen of the world alike is fixed on the political scene, where it is widely believed that the very fate of humanity is being decided.* At moments such as these, how can the quandary over the status of the aesthetic and the complicated if not convoluted meditations on beauty and the sublime not seem superfluous? Confronted with the terror of the wars that a government wages in the name of a terror it invokes or, conversely, presented with the glimmerings of HOPE, the "glorious phantoms" which might burst to illumine *our* tempestuous day, have we always successfully resisted the temptations to look to the aesthetic as the mode through which we might find the way to freedom? How often have we *spelled* (in the sense of substitution, as when a worker spells or relieves her comrade) the alluring problem and blank possibility of the aesthetic, the persistent *question* it poses to "the human mind's imaginings," with an answer, with something that fills in the "vacancy" and thus turns into a "frail spell"? In other words, have we consistently resisted what de Man diagnosed as the "Schillerization" of Kant?

26. When de Man argues that Schiller "offers as a solution" to what Kant painstakingly unearths as "a very difficult problem"–for instance, the problem figuration poses for philosophy–de Man identifies a pattern that not only runs throughout Schiller's project but that finds some unlikely affiliations in contemporary theory. What Kant calls hypotyposis–"the difficulty of rendering, by means of sensory elements, purely intellectual concepts"–is, as de Man puts it, "for Kant certainly a problem for understanding, and a very difficult problem that again threatens philosophical discourse; whereas . . . it is offered by Schiller as a solution" (153) and, ultimately, as a *political* solution. Thus does Schiller declare in his second letter on Aesthetic Education: "If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom" (27). Within the tradition Wilde outlines in his New York lecture on "The English Renaissance," the aesthetic "solution" almost invariably takes the form of a professing or espousing. Given the rhetorical resources of aestheticism's purveyors, the forms of this espousal were remarkably limited, a cliché almost from the very beginning. "Love art for its own sake," Wilde exhorts his New York audience, "and then all things you need will be added to you" (36). I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that according to its many critics as well as to its few proponents, aestheticism makes the embrace of aesthetic judgment into the solution of the many ethical, epistemological, and political problems generated by aesthetic judgment in the first place. But even for its most important exemplars, the effects of the aesthetic are scarcely consistent. If, for instance, the Shelley of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" can be construed to endorse the trajectory which leads from beauty to freedom, the Shelley of "Mont Blanc" spells the problem of an aesthetic experience which cancels every proposed solution and leaves it as an open question.

27. And yet there is no way around the embarrassment of Wilde's aestheticist imperative when it is placed in the context of Kant's painstaking critical analysis of the nature of aesthetic judgment. De Man effectively dismissed the legitimacy of any "lineage that is supposed to lead from Kant, by ways of Schiller and Coleridge, to decadent formalism and aestheticism" by declaring that "the juxtaposition of Kant and Oscar Wilde" "border[s] on caricature" (119). And yet that "lineage"— as illegitimate as it may indeed be —persists in the work of literary critics and philosophers far more theoretically diverse and unlikely than the "American historians of the Enlightenment, of Romanticism, and of the transition from the one to the other" singled out by de Man. In the first place, we do an injustice to Wilde if we fail to stress that his epigrammatic mode—which we have come to recognize as a facet of his performativity or theatricality —operates in an entirely different register from that of critique. If this theatricality seems far removed from the studious absorption of critical philosophy, it poses nonetheless its own pedagogical imperative. For as many fine readers of Wilde have demonstrated, the Socratic process by which the creeds and refrains of aestheticism in the lectures and the dialogues are manufactured makes explicit Wilde's commitment to a certain form of enlightenment. It is the enlightenment that flowers from the love of art; and it is an enlightenment that Wilde believes can be *taught*: whether as a collective mission or a personal disposition, aestheticism is offered as an *ethos*, one which can be professed, learned, cultivated, and lived.

28. Such a position is not incompatible with one that Michel Foucault developed in the latest phase of his work. That an aestheticism could come to be regarded as an ethical mode of being is for Foucault the decisive irony of what he describes as the "event, or set of events and complex historical processes" called the Enlightenment: even as it includes the "projects of rationalization of knowledge," it also offers "the ironic heroization of the present, this transfiguring play of freedom, this ascetic elaboration of the self" that makes *Auflklarung* into an *Ausgang*, the Enlightenment as an exit sign, a name which points the "way out" (313, 312). Foucault's fascinating essay is called "What is Enlightenment?" and it takes its title and its point of departure from the answer to that question Kant published in 1784 in the periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift*. "A minor text," Foucault admits. But "without giving it an exaggerated place in Kant's work," he nonetheless stresses "the connection that exists between this brief article and the three *Critiques*" (*E* 308): "Kant . . . describes Enlightenment as the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority," the moment when humanity begins to be "released from the status of immaturity" (*E* 308, 305). This is the moment, as Foucault puts it, when "the critique is necessary": "the critique is, in a sense, the handbook of reason that has grown up in Enlightenment; and, conversely, the Enlightenment is the age of the critique" (*E* 308).

29. "Kant says that this Enlightenment has a *Wahlspruch*," says Foucault, "a heraldic device, that is, a distinctive feature by which one can be recognized, and . . . also a motto, an instruction that one gives oneself and proposes to others" (*E* 306). If Kant's "heraldic device" is scarcely the flowered lapel of the dandy or (for that matter, the kerchief peaking out from the left rear jeans pocket), its function is the same. And if the content of Kant's motto—*Aude sapere*— is a far cry from "Love art for its own sake," the cry itself, the form of the creed or motto, is not. But what makes Foucault's essay particularly relevant for our forum here is what happens when Foucault takes leave of Kant in the second half of his essay. There he turns to Baudelaire, not to pose a challenge to Kant's *Auflarung*, but to fulfill it or, more precisely, to find and describe the theatre of its realization. The Baudelaire that Foucault invokes is the Baudelaire of *The Painter of Modern Life*, the Baudelaire who "defines modernity as 'the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent," the Baudelaire who proposes and professes "a deliberate attitude" towards this modern condition, "what Baudelaire, in the vocabulary of his day, calls *dandysme*" (310, 311). This entails an education that requires a "discipline more despotic than the most terrible religions": it is the asceticism of aestheticism, realized at this historical moment in "the asceticism of the dandy who makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art" (312). To this characterization of the Enlightenment Foucault adds–emphatically–"one final word": "this ironic

heroization of the present, this transfiguring play of freedom with reality, this ascetic elaboration of the self–Baudelaire does not imagine that these have any place in society itself or in the body politic. They can only be produced in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art" (312). For Foucault, then, the only viable *Ausgang* that *Auflarung* both produces and points out is that of aestheticism, the Enlightenment as the disposition, the *ethos* through which the subject learns "the transfiguring play of freedom with reality" and "dares to know" how to become an (art) object.

November 10

30. Do we ever take leave of our mentors? In the course of this assignment on the teaching of the sublime, I have thought a great deal about the teacher who taught it to me, the teacher with whom I read Shelley's *Defence* as an undergraduate and Kant's *Critiques* as a graduate student. This assignment has prompted me to revisit in an explicit form the question that I have never stopped asking at least implicitly in everything I write: "what would Gayatri think?"

31. I studied with Gayatri Spivak long enough ago and for long enough a period to have witnessed the early responses to her translation of and introduction to *Of Grammatology* as well as the many versions of *"*Can the Subaltern Speak*?"* As any of her former students can attest, the route of Spivak's singular and formidable scholarly project always passes through the crucible of her seminars. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* was no exception. "I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary," she writes in the preface to that book, "but I can break rules. Can anything be learned from this? I ask my two former students who suffered through most of the early parts of the book in the form of classroom teaching: Jenny Sharpe and Tres Pyle" (xiii). I would respond to this question by saying that there can be no reckoning of the debt I owe to what I would call not the *suffering* but the *strain* of a teaching that distends the limits of what one can think beyond the circumference of what one knows.

32. And *back in the day* it was a teaching that always demanded not only the most painstaking engagement with Marx and Hegel, Derrida and Foucault but time and again with Kant, especially the Kant of the *Third Critique* and most especially the Kant of the sublime. But in her teaching as in her essays and books, Spivak was always much more interested in tracing the rhetorical processes through which an experience of the sublime was turned into a judgment than she was in Kant's (or, for that matter, anyone else's) representations of the qualities of a sublime aesthetic experience. Nothing is more indispensable to Spivak's understanding and use of the Kantian sublime than her reading of "a certain subreption." We recall that in the *Third Critique* Kant describes "the feeling of the sublime in nature" as "respect for our own vocation" (or "determination," *Bestimmung*) "which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption" (96). Spivak identifies this as "a clandestine metalepsis (substitution of effect for cause)" (11); and it teaches us, says Spivak, that "the structure of the sublime is a troping. The sublime in nature is operated by a subreptious impropriety. Our access to morality is operated by rhetoric and clandestinity" (12). For Spivak, the implications of this troping are not limited in Kant to the judgments of sublimity. It is instead the case that Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" makes *critically* available a *subreption* at work in the project of culture as the institution of the human which is the path from aesthetic judgment to aesthetic education, or in other words, the anthropomorphism that takes us from Kant to Schiller.

33. Spivak's explicit engagement with Kant in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* is limited to the first of three sections devoted to "Philosophy," itself the first of four main rubrics ("Literature," "History," and "Culture" follow). In a book that runs well over four hundred pages, much of the thirty-seven pages actually assigned to Kant address either his "Schillerization" or "The Critique of Teleological Judgment." When Spivak turns in the second chapter of her book to the figures of "colonialism and

postcoloniality" in "a cluster of literary texts"–Charlotte Bronte, Mary Shelley, Baudelaire, Kipling, Rhys, Mahasweta, Coetzee–she takes leave of the sublime in any of its philosophical expositions or literary representations (x). But if Spivak's attention to the workings of the sublime is quite brief, it *feels* decisive. The trope of subreption that Spivak gleans from Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" not only begins the book but *initiates* the procedures of a genuine *critique* which sets the project in motion "toward" what she points to in her subtitle, "a history of the vanishing present." "My book," she writes in the preface, is "a 'critique' in that it examines the structures of the production of postcolonial reason" (xii). But in its early stages–at least throughout the period I encountered this material in seminars–the book project was called "Master Discourse / Native Informant." The substitution of the Kantian title with its imprimatur of critique is interesting for a number of reasons, including the most obvious: while Spivak's principal engagements with Kant involve the *Third Critique*, the book's title in its final form alludes not to *judgment* but to *reason*, conjuring the Kant of the first two critiques.

34. Though this tactic may sound like a version of the old "bait-and-switch," I think it is more appropriate to describe it in Kantian terms as "a certain subreption" or as what Spivak calls a "subreptious impropriety." For while it is certainly the case that aesthetic judgment in general and the sublime in particular are indispensable to Spivak's project, any reader of this book–or of any of her many other books and essays–will attest that the sublime is not what she moves *toward* and not what she's "after." As I've put it in another context, the "Analytic of the Sublime" functions for Spivak as what she herself has called a *lever*, a piece or element of a text which might be dislodged from its original function and used to different ends, in this case, to pry open the "structures of production of postcolonial reason" ("BCS" 188-189). Spivak takes this notion of the lever from a 1971 interview given by Derrida in which it is invoked as "one among other" concept-metaphors for "one among other" version of the practice of "deconstruction." Pressed by his interviewers Houdebine and Scarpetta to account for the effectivity of deconstruction, Derrida invokes the lever as that which by "strategic necessity," "an *old* name" is displaced and used "to launch a new concept" (71). By just such a "strategic necessity," Spivak makes the "old names" into that which she describes throughout her book as "new and useful readings": here, the "old name" of the Kantian sublime is a lever which "launches a new concept-metaphor" in the form of *this* critique of postcolonial reason, "toward a history of the vanishing present."

35. Spivak distinguishes her reading of the Kantian sublime from that of her own teacher in terms of a *refusal to stop*. If Paul de Man's practice of reading never seems as *useful* to Spivak as Jacques Derrida's version of deconstruction, it is because Spivak understands de Man to *stop short*. In the case at hand, the case of the Kantian sublime, Spivak marks her departure from her teacher by declaring that de Man's readings "stop at Kant's tropology or figurative practice and ignore the dissimulated history and geography of the subject in Kant's text" (16). If the lever of the aesthetic allows her to take leave of "Kant's tropology" as well as de Man's rhetorical readings, it also presents us with the pedagogical tool by which Spivak teaches us not to surrender to the *arrest* of the aesthetic. I would venture that from Spivak's perspective, nothing could sound more oxymoronic—not to say more politically irresponsible—than "aestheticist education." From Spivak's perspective, *aestheticism*—and not merely the indolent and langorous affect it connotes but the very fact of dwelling in or on the nature of aesthetic experience—would be the exemplary case of "stopping short," far short of the critical-linguistic analysis she learned from her teacher and a very far cry indeed from anything that might resemble a "politics of the subject" or a "critique" of the "structures of the production" of knowledge. From Spivak's perspective, there is no "daring to know" in aestheticism; and as an *ethos*, it is not an *Ausgang* but merely a dead-end. In short, from the perspective of her research and from the example of her teaching, Gayatri would think that an aestheticism is just plain *useless*.

36. Must aestheticism always be something that is *espoused* or *denounced*? You know that I've been exploring for some time something I call a *radical* aestheticism. This is not the aestheticism which *espouses* or *professes* "art for art's sake"; and though it is indeed *useless*, I think it is not something which one could *denounce*. Such an aestheticism is not something an artist or a critic or a teacher chooses: it is not an *ethos* or a solution or an *Ausgang.* A genuinely radical aestheticism is best understood as that which *befalls* a text; and its radicality is predicated on the text's inability to escape its originary or root condition as a work of art which is about art. There are, of course, many works of art about art which we would not regard as *aestheticist*, radical or otherwise. One need only to point to "Ozymandias" to demonstrate how a poetic reflection on art can produce unrelenting critical and demystifying results and, as Ian Balfour has demonstrated, can achieve sublimity in the process (Balfour 187-188). But a text *succumbs* to a radical aestheticism the moment it finds itself and its representations of the aesthetic at its "vacating" radical, which is the moment that total aesthetic immersion is experienced as the undoing of any aesthetic claim to an autonomous self-reflexive totality. A *radical* aestheticism is as *useless* as any other version of aestheticism: it is encountered both as the *failure* of the aesthetic to enable any social, political, or ethical resolutions and as the absence of any way out of the aesthetic condition. But a *radical* aestheticism delivers us not to the autonomous domain of pure sensuous perception but to the effects of an interference–what Shelley calls "light's severe excess"–which voids all that is habitually claimed in the name of the aesthetic. In other words, we may judge the aestheticism of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" either to be compelling or disappointing or, for that matter, beautiful; but in my understanding, we cannot call the aestheticism of that poem *radical*.

37. Some of the most arresting examples of this radical aestheticism are to be found in the canon of the Romantic sublime, though the example of "Mont Blanc" demonstrates that the condition of sublimity is not in and of itself the cause of a radical aestheticism. Earlier, I tried to point out that "Mont Blanc" is a sublime poem about the nature and effects of sublimity, one that manages, moreover, to "*teach the adverting mind"*: it offers scenes of instruction which make possible what de Man calls a "negative knowledge" and Shelley "an education of error." Such scenes of instruction are often a feature of the literature of the sublime: one thinks of Apollo's combustible reading lessons in *Hyperion* or the schooling which Keats's visionary poet must suffer at the hands of Moneta in *The Fall of Hyperion*. But I was first prompted to think about the qualities and implications of a genuinely radical aestheticism when I tried yet again to teach the teaching in *The Triumph of Life*, a poem which Arkady Plotnisky has aptly characterized as the "catastrophic sublime."

38. Every time I try to write something about Shelley and in every course I try to teach him, I find myself returning to this one scene in this impossibly sublime poem, the scene at which Shelley's aestheticism arrives at its radicalization. It is the famous scene in which Rousseau, or "what was once Rousseau" recounts to Shelley's speaker the origins of his implication in the "wretched" vision of world history that unfolds before him and us, the "triumph of life." In this hallucinatory scene, our post-Rousseau describes the appearance of a shape which seems to arise "amid" the Sun:

> "And as I looked the bright omnipresence
> Of morning through the orient cave flowed,
> And the Sun's image radiantly intense
>
> "Burned on the waters of the well that glowed
> Like gold, and threaded all the forest maze
> With winding paths of emerald fire–there stood

"Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
Of his own glory, on the vibrating
Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,

"A shape all light (343-352)

As the "Sun's image radiantly intense / Burned on the waters," there appears, "*standing*," "*amid* the sun," "a shape all light." In an essay called "Kindling and Ash," I tried to *read* the staging and production of this figure which I described as "this sensory impossibility, a non-natural and non-theological 'shape all light'" (456). But reading might not get us close enough to what's happening here. To begin with, unlike God or the truth, this "shape all light" is in reality *nothing at all*: it affords no genuine illumination by which the world can be known, especially the urgently *historical* world which unfolds in this poem. "A *shape* all light" is sheer radiance, a radiance which can only exist as the radiance of figuration and which can be beheld only as an aesthetic effect since it is, after all, a figure made of light.

39. *The Triumph of Life* undertakes a poetic reckoning of its own historical "state of emergency" with such critical force that it often feels as if it passes far beyond what Frank O'Hara called "meditations in an emergency" and toward what Spivak might regard as a genuine "critique" of the ideological structures of the production of western history, toward the place where we might *learn* something. And yet the scenes in the poem which are presented with the full weight of an event—with the sense of something happening *now*—are those few intricate impossible scenes in which the peculiar *non-event* of an aesthetic experience is both produced and registered. Peter de Bolla has written that "intense moments of *aesthetic* experience feel as if they are in the orbit of knowing" (12). If an aesthetic experience–including one we judge to be sublime–makes us feel *as if* we are gaining knowledge, when the experience of a radical aestheticism "bursts" upon us, it makes us feel as if we never knew anything or, perhaps, *anything else but this*: as the disfigured Rousseau will describe its effects: "And suddenly my brain became as sand" (405).

40. Before the appearance in the poem of "a shape all light," Shelley's speaker, "sick of this perpetual flow" of history unfolding before him (298), beseeches his guide to teach him something, something autobiographical about how "one of those who have created" has wound up in this parade of "wretchedness." "Partly I seem to know" (300) is the best this disfigured but non-deluded Rousseau can offer. He agrees nonetheless to take on this new pupil:

"But follow thou, and from spectator turn
Actor or victim in this wretchedness"

"And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn
From thee.–Now listen (305-308)

The chiasmic formulation at the center–"what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn / From thee"–is a pedagogical project that Shelley might well have learned from Rousseau, but its function here is a curious one, in part because it makes this lesson into a loop to be played out over and over. What the poem's speaker is about to learn which he may then teach is predicated on his "following"–both his discourse and his example–a teacher who is both "actor" *and* "victim" "in this wretchedness." What the poem's speaker is about to give up in the course of this sublime education is the possibility of "spectatorship"; and what he is about to learn is that he will no longer have purchase on any position of knowledge *outside* this "triumph of life." What he is about to be taught is something more than sublime and less than *useless*: it is the lesson of a radical aestheticism that will get him nowhere but there.

Sincerely,
Forest Pyle

—University of Oregon

Notes

1 "What is ultimately at stake," declares Badiou, for philosophy's "return to itself," "can be formulated in terms of the question which weighs upon us and threatens to exhaust us: can we be delivered, *finally* delivered, from our subjection to Romanticism? (*TW* 22). For Badiou, Romanticism is just another name for "the aura of the poem," that seductive aesthetic light of the poetic object that "seemingly since Nietzsche, but actually since Hegel" "grows ever brighter" (*TW* 25). It reaches its culmination in Heidegger. According to Badiou, the "essence of the process of Heideggerian thought"—its constitutive gesture–is Romantic: it is a "subtraction" of the poem "from philosophical *knowledge*, to render it *truth*" (*IT* 72,73). The trajectory of Heidegger's thought leads him to "restore, under various and subtle philosophical names, the sacral authority of the poetic utterance, and the idea that the authentic lies in the flesh of language" (*IT* 73-74). There are, says Badiou, "three possible regimes of the bond between the poem and philosophy," "regimes" that are distinguished by varying philosophical dispositions of philosophy and the poem. The first of these, which Badiou calls the "Parmenidian," "organizes a *fusion* between the subjective authority of the poem and the validity of statements held as philosophical. Even when 'mathematical' interruptions figure under this fusion, they are definitely subordinated to the *sacred* aura of utterance, to its 'profound' value, to its enunciative legitimacy. The image, language's equivocations, and metaphor escort and authorize the saying of the True. Authenticity resides in the flesh of language" (*IT* 72). In Badiou's schema the Platonic and the Aristotelian "regimes" break with this Parmenidian "fusion": Plato "distances" the "undermining fascination" of the poem from philosophy simply by banishing the poets; while for Aristotle, "the poem is no longer thought in terms of the drama of its distance or its intimate proximity, it is grasped *within the category of the object*" and becomes "a regional discipline within philosophy," that which will come to be called "Aesthetics" (*IT* 72). As Badiou sees it, Heidegger misses the opportunity "of inventing a fourth relation" between poem and philosophy; instead, he removes the poem from the domain of knowledge and restores, via Heraclitus, its Parmenidian essence, its sacred aura–which is, of course, another name for *aestheticism*.

I take the liberty of this lone and lengthy excursion from the body of my letter because Badiou acknowledges that "philosophy is sometimes obliged to expose itself to the poem, " especially since it *must* deploy "language's literary resources" in order to "present the unpresentable void"—or what we often call the sublime (*IT* 73,79). Badiou's answer to this poetic necessity is not Parmenides but Lucretius, the Epicurean whose only extant poem, *De rerum natura*, is a didactic hymn to an "intransigent materialism" (*IT* 79): "Nothing in it is ontotheological; there is no supreme being for Lucretius, the heaven is void, the gods are indifferent" (*IT* 80). But I would venture that this points out why Badiou is not "*finally* delivered" from Romanticism or at least not from that Shelleyan strain of Romanticism which is, in a thoroughly discernible form, *Lucretian*: we can behold it in Shelley's approving account of Lucretius in the *Refutation of Deism* as the poet who "dared publicly to avow" his "faith in atheism with impunity" and in the invocation of Lucretius in *The Defense of Poetry* as a "creator" in the "highest sense." And, in the "highest sense," "Mont Blanc" might be more about the Lucretian sublime than it is about Mont Blanc.

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The Sublime and Education

Menace to Philosophy: Jacques Derrida and the Academic Sublime

Deborah Elise White, Emory University

Introduction: A Certain Terror

1. In "Punctuations: The Time of a Thesis," the opening statement of Derrida's 1980 thesis defense for the *doctorat d'état*, he refers to "a certain terror" before his trajectory.[1] The context is a recollection of Jean Hyppolite's informal response to "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at the 1966 Johns Hopkins Colloquium on *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*: "'That said, I really do not see where you are going.'" Derrida remarks that "perhaps [. . .] concerning this place where I am going, I in fact know enough about it to think, with a certain terror [*une certaine terreur*] that things there are not going very well and that, all things considered, it would be better not to go there at all" (*Right II* 115f.; 442). What is at stake in this reference to "a certain terror"? In what way is terror associated with the power to mobilize and to immobilize a trajectory which, with characteristic reservations, Derrida refers to elsewhere in "Punctuations" as "deconstruction"?[2] "Structure, Sign, and Play" itself famously concludes with "the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself [. . .] in the formless, mute, infant, and *terrifying* form of monstrosity (*Writing and Difference* 293, my emphasis). With these words, terror appears as part of the promise and menace of futurity, but "Punctuations" has a still more concrete agenda.[3] It conjures up terror in an explicitly academic and institutional frame. In "Punctuations," Derrida does not precisely defend his "thesis," which consisted of already published works submitted to count *as* a thesis that, in a manner of speaking, remained unwritten. Rather, he defends an earlier decision not to submit a thesis for the academically legitimating *doctorat d'état* and, by the same token, defends his decision to submit one (however equivocally) on the present occasion. This double gesture itself constitutes a kind of thesis, for the implicit argument is that his philosophical writings and his institutional hesitations cannot be disentangled. They *both* participate in the discourse(s) of deconstruction.[4] Confirming the connection, "Punctuations" appears in a collection of Derrida's writings devoted to institutional problems and polemics: *Du Droit à la Philosophie* (published as two volumes in English: *Who's Afraid of Philosophy: Right to Philosophy I* and the volume in which "Punctuations" appears, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy II*). Restricted to a polemical, institutional context, the invocation of terror remains provoking. What are the stakes of "terror" in the institution(s) of philosophy and, more particularly, the university?[5]

2. I propose to explore this last question by drawing on the literary and philosophical concept through which modernity traditionally confronts terror: the sublime. Terror recalls the aesthetics of the sublime, and Derrida's institutional writings repeatedly test themselves against its vocabulary. Certainly, the sublime does not belong to a specifically Derridean lexicon – iterability, *différance*, invagination – nor does the sublime often appear to have the paleonymic function of other deconstructive appropriations of philosophical concepts. And yet it does have an important and, at times, unexpected, valence in Derrida's work on academic institutions – work in which one should always read "institution" as both a noun and a verb. Allusions to the sublime recur throughout *Du Droit à la Philosophie*. Some are explicit; others oblique or glancing. They all set the sublime to work (and are set to work by it) in ways crucial to thinking the university as a site of institutional responsibility.

3. The 'institutional' cannot and should not be isolated from the 'philosophical.' The aporetic and undecidable character of their encounter operates one relay between the texts of *Droit* and the excesses

and aporias of the sublime. Philosophy becomes, even as it overruns, 'itself' in and as its institutions. (One should add that these are not restricted to the university, though the university may be the most prominent.) The texts gathered together in *Droit* repeatedly address the need for philosophy to engage its institutional conditions of possibility. At times, the tone is straightforwardly polemical: "[It] is impossible, now more than ever, to dissociate the work we do, within one discipline or several, from a reflection on the political and institutional conditions of that work" (*Right II* 129). At others, the polemics are themselves subject to questioning. At what point in the work of institutionalizing itself does philosophy become something else? The preface to *Droit*, "Privilege," comments that the "juridico-political" problematics of the volume trouble the determination of the philosophical in the name of something that may or may not be philosophy. In order to fight for its rights (for example, in school curricula, universities, and government policy) philosophy may have to cross the line into unknown disciplinary territory:

> [….] most of the texts collected in this volume claim to participate in such a 'fight.' Will they have done so in the name of philosophy? Or in the name of something else that could be the affirmation of a thinking that is still or already foreign to philosophy and even to the question about philosophy? The very form of these questions no doubt deserves the most guarded, patient, suspended, we might even say unresolved attention. (*Right I* 27)

The unresolved character of Derrida's relation to what is arguably his central argument concerning the institutional determinations of intellectual positions – and the need for disciplinary border crossing – separates his project from sociological, political, or even ideological critique. Tilottama Rajan has rightly pointed to the Bourdieuvian (and Foucauldian) language that can be found in parts of *Droit* (Rajan 149), but Derrida repeatedly refuses to equate his concern with philosophical or academic institutions with what he calls a sociology or politology of knowledge.

4. A responsible rethinking of the founding philosophical premises of the university must include a rethinking of the founding philosophical premises of the sociological and political 'critique' that has claimed the mantle of responsible thinking *from* philosophy. For all critique bears within it implicit and often unacknowledged philosophical assumptions:

> These disciplines [sociology, politology] are no doubt more necessary than ever; I would be the last to want to disqualify them. But whatever conceptual apparatus they may have [. . .] they never touch upon that which, in themselves, continues to be based on the principle of reason and thus on the essential foundation of the modern university. They never question scientific normativity; beginning with the value of objectivity or of objectification, which governs and authorizes their discourse. Whatever their scientific value – and it can be considerable – these sociologies of the institution remain in this sense internal to the university, intra-institutional, controlled by the deep-seated norms, even of the programs, of the space that they claim to analyze. (*Right II* 149)

5. On the one hand, philosophy and philosophical critique must not be thought apart from its institutional formations, but on the other, its institutional formations must not be thought apart from their philosophical and critical implications.[6] The ensuing predicament allows *neither* for sublimation into the idea(l)s of philosophical tradition *nor* for decomposition into the materials of institutional practice but partakes, undecidably, of both.

6. As suggested above, the instance of undecidability poses a point of contact between the texts of *Droit* and the discourse of the sublime (and undecidability punctuates allusions to the sublime throughout Derrida's writing). In the Kantian tradition which is Derrida's primary point of reference, the sublime names an impossible articulation of incommensurable forces. One stands suspended before a clash of

freedom and nature that Kant does not so much resolve as decide, finally, in favor of freedom. To summarize somewhat schematically, Kant posits two 'types' of sublimity. In the mathematically sublime, imagination offers a sensory presentation of magnitude that reaches towards, but can never arrive at, infinity; understanding can keep on counting to higher and higher numbers, but imagination, the faculty that presents what one understands to the senses, will eventually be unable to keep up. It cannot maintain the *aesthetic* (that is, perceptible) sense of a measure: "[imagination] soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically largest basic measure for an estimation of magnitude" (CJ 108). In this encounter with the infinite, reason intervenes to think the infinite *as if* it were a given, graspable totality. It thinks what the imagination can never encompass: "reason demands comprehension in *one* intuition, and *exhibition* of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time)" (111). In effect, reason demands that imagination give sensible form to the very grounds of the sensory world, for only by doing so can imagination encompass the world's totality. In other words, reason demands the sensory presentation of the *super*sensible.

7. Responding to reason's demand, imagination inevitably fails and its failure generates the irresolution of the sublime, its peculiarly negative pleasure: "This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a vibration, i.e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object" (115). But imagination succeeds in being a failure. As Derrida writes in his account of the mathematically sublime in "Parergon" (his book-length essay on *The Critique of Judgment*): "Presentation is inadequate to the idea of reason but it is presented in its very inadequation, adequate to its inadequation" (*Truth* 131). Ultimately, imagination's failure generates an intimation of reason's capacity to transcend the sensory world. The incommensurability of the two terms brings into focus the sublime "mental attunement" of the judging subject (112; 113) – its freedom from the world of the senses and thus its capacity for moral action. Alternatively, though following a partly analogous pattern, the dynamically sublime confronts the subject with the sheer power of nature rather than its magnitude. Experiencing nature's power as fearful without actually falling prey to fear, the subject discovers its superiority to nature – its freedom. That is, the subject is recalled to its supersensible destiny as a moral being precisely by being exposed to its sensory vulnerability. The determination of the self by exterior forces gives way to its determination from within, heteronomy to autonomy. With the dynamically sublime, in particular, philosophy seeks to master terror – the menace that Derrida locates at the limits of philosophical mastery.

8. The incommensurability of reason and imagination suggests why the sublime cannot help but play a role in texts that address themselves to the impossible realization of philosophical institutions in general and the university in particular. For Derrida, institutional questions generate what he calls (again recalling Kant) "the *antinomies* of the philosophical discipline" (*Right II* 165-174, my emphasis). One must think philosophy as a discipline in its autonomy and in its heteronomy, for the university (the exemplary philosophical institution) can only be adequate to its *inadequation* to the philosophical idea of reason that it supposedly embodies (cf. "The Principle of Reason" discussed below). Extending Kant Derrida also asks whether the idea of Reason is even, as it were, adequate to itself. So, for example, in positing the principle of reason as the ground of the university, the question concerning the ground of that ground – and the university itself – is left hanging: "The abyss, the hole, the *Abgrund*, the empty 'gorge' would be the impossibility for a principle of grounding to ground itself. This very grounding, then, like the university, would have to hold itself suspended above a most peculiar void" (*Right II* 137). The university opens onto an abyss and, as Derrida recalls in "Parergon," "the abyss […] would be the privileged presentation of the sublime" (*Truth* 129).[7]

9. Philosophy has often tried to contain the terrors of the abyss. Kant's sublime is one such effort. But Derrida's writings suggest that philosophy cannot help but open itself to the very terrors it tries to contain. Its singular privilege is to put itself to the question and, in doing so, to expose that same

singular privilege "to danger [*à la menace*] or presentation, sometimes to the risk of presentation" (*Right I* 2; 12). What menaces philosophy is thus not external to it but, rather, its founding premise. The institutional conditions of philosophy – which are inextricably intertwined with its presentation – entail the language of the sublime insofar as they cannot help but institute a field of *risk* in and as which philosophy takes place. The institution of norms betrays the original determination of philosophy as a questioning of norms, but the absence of institution leaves it prey to a normativity all the more forceful for never having been acknowledged let alone questioned.

10. In what follows, I explore the displacements operated on and by the sublime as Derrida engages these challenges. Part I opens with the explicitly marked role of the sublime in "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils" in order to consider how a sublime temporality – the chance of an instant or the blink of an eye – exposes itself to "the risk of presentation" in the institution of the university. The impossible (re)presentation or narrativization of the instant signals the allegorical dimension of Derrida's project, and Part II traces the relation of Derrida's sublime to an allegorical tradition that looks back to Paul's *Epistles*. It further explores how that tradition informs the materiality of the teaching body in "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How it Ends," a text in which the teaching body is the focal point of incommensurabilities of letter and spirit characterized as, precisely, "sublime." Part III concludes with the obliquely marked recurrence of the sublime throughout *Droit* in the text's many references to "menace."[8] Their iterative undercurrent suggests that philosophy and its institutions cannot be disengaged from a threat of danger that is, arguably, the underside of the quasi-messianic promise so often invoked in Derrida's writings. "Menace" will also turn out to have been the ultimate if indirect topic of Parts I and II, for what is at stake throughout this essay is the feeling of menace *against* which a certain discourse of the sublime and a certain allegorical (re)presentation seek to erect an institutional and disciplinary shield as if in defense of (the right to) philosophy. At the same time, and however problematically, the sublime and its allegorization remain an unavoidable touchstone for thinking this menace and "the entirely other of a terrifying future" (*Right II* 88) to which – or from which – it points.

I. Properly Sublime

11. In "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils" the sublime is center stage – or, rather, it is the stage. Derrida originally delivered "The Principle of Reason" as the inaugural lecture of his tenure as Andrew D. White Professor at Large at Cornell University. The occasion characteristically informs the argument in ways both playful and serious as he recalls the crucial place of the sublime in the history of Cornell – the remarkable landscape setting that has become so much a part of its identity. With this history and this landscape in mind, he ironically solicits the sympathies of his audience: "Perhaps now you can better imagine with what shudders of awe [*tremblements quasi religieux*] I prepared myself to speak to you on the subject – quite properly sublime – of the essence of the university. Sublime in the Kantian sense of the term" (*Right II* 134; 469).[9]

12. The passage verges on satire. Already, in the very opening of "Parergon," a text written long before the Cornell lecture, Derrida seems to cast an ironically divided eye over the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime: "it's enough to say: abyss and satire of the abyss" (*Truth* 18). A satire of the abyss seems to divide the abyssal scenography of "The Principle of Reason" as well. Derrida takes the measure of the "properly sublime" at a distance, for the "properly sublime," or the "sublime in the Kantian sense" remains *normative*. It gives the subject a (negative) intimation of autonomy – the feeling of its own subjectivity as freedom from nature. In the economic vocabulary with which Derrida broaches the sublime in "Economimesis," (another essay on *The Critique of Judgment* and a missing chapter, as it were, from the longer "Parergon") the sublime inscribes its negativity within a restricted aesthetic economy. It circulates through a system of exchange in which the sacrificial labor of imagination

enables the surplus value of the subject's freedom to announce itself. Imaginative incapacity signifies rational mastery. For this reason, "Economimesis" explicitly denies that the sublime is in any way heterogeneous to the fundamental oppositions that structure and found transcendental critique – freedom versus nature, subject versus object, sensory versus supersensory:

> Although repulsive on one of its faces, the sublime is not the absolute other of the beautiful. It still provokes a certain pleasure. Its negativity does indeed provoke a disagreement between the faculties and disorder in the unity of the subject. But it is still productive of pleasure and the system of reason can account for it. A still internal negativity does not reduce to silence; it lets itself be spoken. The sublime can dawn in art. The silence it imposes by taking the breath away and by preventing speech is less than ever heterogeneous to spirit and freedom. The movement of reappropriation on the contrary is even more active. That which in this silence works against our senses or in opposition to the interest of sense (*hinderance* and *sacrifice*, says Kant) keeps the extension of a domain and of power in view. *Sacrifice* [*Aufopferung*] and *spoliation* [*Beraubung*], through the experience of a negative *Wohlgefallen*, thus allows for the acquisition of an extension and a power [*Macht*] greater than what is sacrificed to them. ("Economimesis" 21f.)[10]

13. The sublime brings critical philosophy to a crisis in the incommensurability of imagination and reason and, thus, too, of nature and freedom, or of knowledge and ethics. But reason's final victory in translating the negativity of imagination into the sign of its own sovereignty is all the greater. The critical subject reproduces itself through the breakdown of its faculties. Thinkers of the sublime close to Derrida, notably Lyotard and De Man, have argued that the negativity of the sublime is not so easily overcome (or even isolated as *negative*) within the critical system – that the sublime is, in some ways, heterogeneous to critique and critical normativity.[11] Derrida's own writings outside of "Economimesis" suggest a certain ambiguity on this point as in his focus on the not-quite-sublime figure of the colossal in "Parergon" (*Truth* 119-147 and discussed below). But in much of his work the sublime appears provisionally to name a rigorous negativity that nonetheless remains normative (or dialectizable) within the system of aesthetics that underwrites critical philosophy and that remains academically sovereign within the university. The subject of the Kantian sublime remains a subject. And when Derrida writes that the "subject" of the university (that is, the "subject" of his lecture but also, perhaps, punningly, the subject interpellated by the university) is "properly sublime […] in the Kantian sense" he may be hinting at the normative and self-reproductive dimension of academic discourse and the many ways in which it perpetuates itself through a dialectic of crisis and legitimation.[12] (The demand that every doctoral thesis present new research and the correspondingly strict protocols for what counts as new is a minimal version of crisis as the condition of academic legitimation and reproduction.)[13]

14. Derrida is also making a simpler claim. What is "properly sublime…in the Kantian sense" about the essence of the university is that its founding idea necessarily exceeds any attempt to realize it:

> In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant averred that the university should be governed by 'an idea of reason,' the idea of the whole field of what is presently teachable […]. As it happens, no experience in the present allows for an adequate grasp of that present, presentable totality of doctrine, of teachable theory. But the crushing sense of that inadequacy is precisely the exalting, desperate sense of the sublime, suspended between life and death. (*Right II* 134)

The university tries to embody a totality that cannot be embodied but only *thought* by reason as its own idea. In this characterization, Derrida isolates a very particular schematic of the sublime: the clash of

the totality of an idea with the finitude of human imaginings. But in a more technical sense, one may wonder whether his formula *is* properly sublime: Kant insists that the sublime may be found only in relation to raw nature and that "a pure judgment about the sublime […] must have no purpose whatsoever of the object as the basis determining it, if it is to be aesthetic and not mingled with some judgment of understanding or of reason" (*CJ 109*). The university is only improperly sublime insofar as we necessarily judge it in relation to "'an idea of reason'" or to any idea of how the university "should," as Derrida writes, "be governed."[14] The impurity of the academic sublime gives it a peculiarly redoubled reflexivity, since the totality demanded by the idea of reason is the idea of reason in its totality. In the Kantian sublime, reason *always* ends by thinking (of) itself, but when the subject matter of thought is the university, the reflexivity of reason arises in relation to a deliberate attempt to think and see itself through the (cracked) mirror of its own institution. The idea of reason that inheres in the university as an institution may pre-empt a purely aesthetic response, but it intensifies the reflexivity of the university and thus leaves it all the more open to something like Derrida's divisive irony when he calls it "properly sublime."[15]

15. The university divides as if *against* its own sublimity. At least that is the story of Cornell as Derrida tells it. The very phrase "properly sublime" risks falling into cliché by making the sublime appear all too proper – definable, graspable, limited – at the very moment one asserts its overwhelming power to exceed boundaries. Likewise, a deliberate staging of the sublime risks pre-determining it on a human scale.[16] Derrida repeats the story of how the founders of Cornell chose the university's spectacular setting for a combination of pragmatic and aesthetic reasons. It was far enough from town to leave room for the university to grow; at the same time, its stunning scenery would have the power to inspire sublime thoughts – that is, to inspire reason itself. Derrida cites James Siegel's account:

    > Cornell's plan seems to have been shaped by the thematics of the Romantic sublime, which practically guaranteed that a cultivated man in the presence of certain landscapes would find his thoughts drifting metonymically through a series of topics – solitude, ambition, melancholy, death, spirituality, 'classical inspiration' – which could lead, by an easy extension, to questions of culture and pedagogy. (qtd. 133-134)

    Rendering reason as landscape, the grounds of the university become a decidedly literal figure for its philosophical ground. Kant writes that the desire for a literal, sensory relation to the sublime is "*lächerlich*" or, as Pluhar translates,"ridiculous" (136; 202). Only a fanatic demands to "*SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility*" (135, Kant's emphasis). Fanaticism is a kind of mania (*Wahnwitz*) and "of these latter is least of all compatible with the sublime, because it is ridiculous in a somber way" (136; 202). The contrary error is a complete absence of sensory relation to the sublime, when an unlimited imagination "[rises] to the level of enthusiasm" (135). Enthusiasm is a parodic intensification of the sublime "comparable to *madness* [*Wahnsinn*]" (135, 202; Kant's emphasis). For Derrida, the university is "properly" (that is, also ironically) sublime because it is both "a matter of life and death" (*Right II* 134) and "ridiculous" in its attempt to (re)produce the sublime literally – that is, to institutionalize reason – whether in a landscape or, for that matter, a faculty. In contrast, the high-mindedness of a purely anti-institutional position approaches the madness of enthusiasm.[17]

16. One of the topical debates informing Derrida's lecture concerns plans to build protective barriers on the bridges spanning the gorges leading to and from the Cornell campus. The barriers were intended to prevent suicidal passersby flinging themselves over the bridges and into the gorges. However somber the scenario, it still occasionally inspires ridicule. A 2003 editorial in the *Stanford Daily* calls Cornell "the butt of every other university's jokes because we'd all like to believe that suicide is something that happens to other students on some other campus, and not to us. (Cornell is infamous as the United States university with the highest suicide rate amongst its student body)" (Freytag). One crosses the bridge to the university – any university – through "the abyss *and* satire of the abyss," though which

one is which may not always be easy to decide. The sublime subject internalizes the abyss in a realization of his own sublimity; the passerby who throws himself into the gorge seemingly turns the process inside out. At issue is not the actual psychology of suicide (which is neither Derrida's topic nor mine) but the problematic inscription of the sublime in literal scenographies. The very seductiveness of the literal clarifies the potential bad faith of seemingly less fanatical or less literal claims to a melancholy interiority "which could lead by an easy extension to questions of culture and pedagogy" – that is, to a melancholy interiority that leads back to the institution as a set of normative determinations.[18]

17. Derrida is nowhere more pedagogical than in his allegorization of the Cornell landscape. He concludes "The Principle of Reason" by describing two ways "not to speak" (*Right II* 129) of the university. On the one hand, one must not plunge into the abyss of a radicalism that finally consumes itself in its refusal of all relation to the institution's canons, protocols, and traditions, including those that determine it as standing apart from the world that surrounds it. One must not assume, for example, that refusing to submit a doctoral thesis necessarily serves to undermine the legitimating function of a Ph.D. or that opening the university to its surroundings will necessarily endow it with social or political relevance. On the other hand, one must not put up protective barriers around the institution's canons, traditions, and protocols, sealing them off in a vacuum as deadly as the abyss that the barriers seek to screen. One cannot defend the university by closing one's eyes and pretending that an abyss (and satire of an abyss) does not surround it:

> Thinking requires *both* the principle of reason *and* what is beyond the principle of reason, the *arche* and an-archy [. . .] Beware of the abysses and the gorges, but also of the bridges and the barriers. Beware of what opens the university to the outside and the bottomless, but also of what, closing in on itself, would create only an illusion of closure, would make the university available to any sort of interest, or else render it perfectly useless. (*Right II* 153)

The university is only "properly sublime" in its own fanatical fantasies. They are the other side of the sublime melancholy which the founders of Cornell hoped to cultivate. But what if fanaticism is the not so hidden truth of the sublime? Elsewhere, Derrida recalls Kant's argument in "Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone" that "the sublimity of moral law" inevitably clashes with the "finitude and fallibility of man" (*Right II* 48). The *Critique of Judgment* stages that clash in the act of subreption. On the one hand, sublimity brings a finite subject into contact with its infinite vocation; on the other, the subject ends by misrecognizing himself in an act of "subreption (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within ourselves as subjects [. . .]" (114). The subject misrecognizes himself in the abyss as if *it* were sublime. Subreption thus already announces the errant literalism of the fanatic. The sublime cannot escape this errancy – which is the errancy of institution and what Derrida, in "Privilege," points to as the "risk of presentation."[19] "The Principle of Reason" suggests that the properly sublime university should not even try to do so. Rather it should maintain a "double keeping" (155) that watches over sublimity *and* its subreption with the "unresolved attention" of thinking.

18. The time of a 'thinking' that answers *at once* to the principle of reason and to what is beyond it, to *arche* and to an-archy, may entail a sublime that is not finally normative in the way "Economimesis" describes. "Double keeping" interrupts temporal consciousness in an instant whose imperceptible force can never be fully absorbed by an historical institution. It occurs in "the blink of an eye" (154), a quasi-temporal figure that proves crucial because it embeds the force of the instant in the very 'reason' it disturbs. Initially, in "The Principle of Reason," reason appears *as* a seeing eye. The eye of reason opens and closes. It takes things in but also shuts them out, the better to hear – that is, to internalize – knowledge. But when the eye returns later in the essay it 'blinks' the better to *interrupt* the time of

internalization – which is also to say, internalization as time, or Kant's "inner sense." With the "blink of an eye" the eye that figures reason at once figures its disruption. The "'blink of an eye'" or "*Augenblick*" (literally the rapid movement of an eye) gives "the chance: for the event of thought" that is no longer simply answerable *to* reason, but answerable *for* reason (154). The instant enables reflection on the very powers of reflection that underwrite the "reason" of the university. In the instant, the (rational) *seeing* of the subject can itself be seen, its hearing heard. Yet, as Derrida describes it, this supplemental reflexivity differs from the reflexivity of the reason it supplements because it cannot be assimilated to subjectivity or the *time* of the subject.[20]

> Then the time of reflection is also an other time: it is heterogeneous to what it reflects; and perhaps gives time for what calls for and is called thinking. It is the chance for an event about which one does not know whether or not, presenting itself *within* the university, it belongs to the history of the university. […] The chance for this event is the chance of an instant, an *Augenblick*, a 'wink' or a 'blink'; it takes place 'in the blink of an eye.' (*Right II* 154)

The chance of an instant remains elusive, not to say undecidable. The subject only has access to the heterogeneous "other time" of an "other" reflection indirectly or *allegorically*, through narratives unfolding in so-called vulgar time (the Kantian "inner sense"). Such narratives include the Kantian sublime and its allegory of the faculties in which imagination "sacrifices" itself to reason (*CJ* 129). As De Man describes Kant's language, "it is a story, a dramatized scene of the mind in action. The faculties of reason and of imagination are personified, or anthropomorphized" (*Aesthetic Ideology* 86). In "Parergon," Derrida underlines both the recourse to travel narrative (in Kant's references to Savary) and the narrative back-and-forth of apprehension and comprehension in Kant's preliminary account of the sublime: "But does not the distance required for the experience of the sublime open up perception to the space of narrative? Does not the divergence between apprehension and comprehension already appeal to a narrative voice?" (*Truth* 142). As a narrative, allegory obscures the sublime instant which is its own condition of (im)possibility. It operates disjunctively in relation to what it (re)presents "as if [an] ironic moment were signed, were sealed within the body of [its] allegorical writing" (*Memoirs* 84). [21]

19. In "The Principle of Reason" Derrida refers the *Augenblick* to Kierkegaard rather than Kant, but one finds it posited in *The Critique of Judgment* as the crucial articulation (or, better, non-articulation) of the Kantian sublime. Despite Kant's seeming normativity, he does refer to the instant (*Augenblick*) that, as if sealed within the allegory of sublime subjectivity, ironizes its narrative. The temporal synthesis of the imagination is interrupted when reason demands that imagination present an infinite series all at once – in the blink of an eye. The 'all at once' is heterogeneous to the inner sense that constitutes time as a sequence. Therefore, it is not one intensely condensed moment among other moments; it stands 'outside' all measures of time, and the name "instant" (or *Augenblick*) is at best a catachresis for something that can only be *thought* by reason as the substratum (that is neither temporal nor spatial) of nature. Bringing multiplicity into the unity of an intuition through its power of successive presentation, imagination approaches a limit and, at the limit, and in an instant, does violence to itself:

> [C]omprehending in one instant [*in einen Augenblick*] what is apprehended successively, is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination's progression and makes *simultaneity* intuitable. Hence (since temporal succession is a condition of the inner sense and of an intuition) it is a subjective movement of the imagination by which it does violence to inner sense, and this violence must be the more significant the larger the quantum is that the imagination comprehends in one intuition. Hence the effort to take up into a single intuition a measure for magnitude requiring a significant time for apprehension is a way of presenting which subjectively considered is contrapurposive, but

> which objectively is needed to estimate magnitude and hence is purposive. And yet this same violence that the imagination inflicts on the subject is still judged purposive *for the whole vocation* of the mind. (*CJ* 116; 182)

In *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Lyotard draws special attention to this passage in order to explicate the peculiar temporal character of the sublime. Here I cannot review his entire analysis (which draws on the *First* as well as the *Third Critique*). I recall only his attention to the temporal heterogeneity of the *Augenblick*, a heterogeneity which prevents the reflexivity of reflexivity that Derrida articulates (the seeing of seeing) from becoming no more than a play of equivalent and equivocating mirrors. Seeing seeing dislocates the meaning of 'seeing' between the two uses of the word.[22] Lyotard argues that by doing violence to the inner sense – that is, to "the temporal synthesis, which is itself constitutive of the synthesis of apperception" (144), the sublime disrupts the 'I think' and thus strikes a blow at subjectivity itself. In the pleasure and pain of the sublime, the 'I think' of knowledge seems no longer necessary to Kant. Yet it is felt subjectively "and felt as *zweckwidrig*, as contravening the finality of the faculty of presentation [imagination]" (144). Just as time is annihilated for imagination, it is annihilated for reason. But Lyotard will argue that the implications for reason are entirely different. Again, a blink of an eye is the (a)temporal unit of the advent of the sublime:

> At the very moment (I dare say) when the thought that imagines seems threatened with annihilation by its 'regression,' that is by working against the current of the succession it usually needs, the (rational) thought of reason also feels serial time to be annihilated in the Idea of the infinite as absolute whole and, further still, as we have shown, in the Idea of absolute causality [that is, causality through freedom]. The power to engender an 'effect' without being determined to do it by a condition does not involve the temporality wherein phenomena are perceived and explained according to their linkage. (145)

These two interruptions of seriality work at odds with each other; they are "two very heterogeneous feelings" (145). Imagination must not permit the interruption to persist, for it must save the ability of thought to continue to synthesize (in time) what imagination cannot. Reason, on the other hand, experiences "the exaltation of recovering the maximal power that thinking has of *beginning* a series of givens without being bound to it […]" (145, my emphasis). Lyotard concludes, somewhat differently from Derrida, that Kant is finally not a philosopher of the subject. However, in "The Principle of Reason," Derrida's "blink of an eye" functions as a remainder of the Kantian sublime that implicitly converges with Lyotard's reading.[23] The sublime instant brings subjectivity to a crisis it cannot overcome.

20. Derrida explicitly refers the instant to the sublime elsewhere in his writing. In a discussion of De Man that addresses the ironic relation of the instant to allegory, he notes the motif of "acceleration, of absolute precipitousness" that informs its peculiar temporality in De Man's work (*Memoirs* 62). As in the "absolutely large" (*CJ* 103) of the mathematically sublime, the "absolute precipitousness" of the instant involves an incomparable measure of time:

> These words [acceleration, precipitousness] do not designate a particular rhythm, a measurable or comparable speed, but a movement which attempts through an infinite acceleration to win time, to win over time, to deny it, one might say, but in a non-dialectical fashion, since it is the form of the instant that is charged with the absolute discontinuity of this rhythm without rhythm. This acceleration is incommensurable, and thus infinite and null at the same time; it touches the sublime. (*Memoirs* 62)

In the instant, as in the Kantian sublime, time leaps out of itself as if to leave itself behind. It is (not) what it cannot be.

21. The “double keeping” of thought is the work of such a sublime instant. It keeps faith with memory – canons, traditions, protocols of legitimation – and with chance – futurity, unpredictability, eruptions of the new (*Right II* 155). It enshrines the past even as, in Lyotard’s words, it experiences “the maximal power that thinking has of beginning.” In the clash of these two heterogeneous impulses the university arises. It gives duration to the instant, setting in motion the “movement of reappropriation” (“Economimesis” 21) that, for Derrida, characterizes the normative trajectory of the Kantian sublime. But the instant leaves a virtual remainder – the unmarked scar of a cut in time that interrupts that normative trajectory even as its elusiveness makes it seem, and perhaps not merely seem, illusory. In other words, the university allegorizes a break in the temporal (and *a fortiori* the social and political) continuum that surrounds it, but a break whose status remains undecidable. Since the instant never appears as such and its occurrence (or its having occurred) can never be guaranteed, it can only operate as a kind of fiction – which by no means prevents it from having actual effects. To borrow from Kant, the allegory of the university offers a temporalizing “subreption” (114) of the atemporal, an illegitimate (re)presentation of the un(re)presentable, but neither the atemporal nor the un(re)presentable can be thought outside of such subreption and representation.[24] The university can thus all too easily misrecognize itself in its most sublime or most fanatical claims. It nonetheless remains the privileged site of “a double keeping”— “*as if* an ironic moment were signed, were sealed in the body of [its] allegorical writing” (*Memoirs* 84, my emphasis).

II. The Body of an Allegorical Writing

22. In a reading of Derrida, one may find the prominent use of the term ‘allegory’ to be somewhat surprising. Marc Redfield recently recalled Derrida’s dry remark that “one cannot understand [De Man’s] privileging of allegory – I was long puzzled by it for this very reason – if one is not familiar with the internal debates of Anglo-American criticism concerning Romanticism” (*Memoirs* 77; qtd. in Redfield 228). But in addition to showing an acute responsiveness to De Man’s writings on allegory, Derrida’s writing is deeply embedded in an exegetical tradition that cannot be understood without reference to allegory – a tradition that is, at times, marked in his own idiom by allusions to the Medusa and petrification.[25] The concluding section of “Parergon,” “The Colossal,” already links the sublime to the ancient *topos* of the book of nature: “The question is still, as we know now, the cipher writing [*Chiffreshcrift*] on the surface of nature” (*Truth* 146). In the Kantian sublime, the book of nature *allegorizes* the freedom that can never actually *appear* in nature. That is, one cannot sense freedom (or its causality) in the natural world, but one can interpret the natural world as a series of signs pointing negatively to freedom and, in that very act of interpretation, achieve an indirect intimation of the freedom one cannot sense.

23. Still more crucially, “The Colossal” emphasizes the not quite sublime “colossal” which, in Derrida’s reading, “derives” from the sublime (122). The colossal is “the mere exhibition of a concept if that concept is almost too large for an exhibition” (*CJ* 109). As “*almost* too large” the colossal challenges one’s ability to delimit and define the sublime and thus confirms the sublime as seemingly without “parergon” or defining frame (127). A quite different aspect of the colossal also draws Derrida’s attention – its connection to the colossus, a stony human effigy, almost an idol.[26] In its stoniness, the colossal seems to stand in metaphorical relation to the initial stone-like fixity that overwhelms the subject in the sublime – the initial feeling of inhibition and arrest that only later gives way to a feeling of vitality and sovereignty (128, cf. *CJ* 98). But petrification has more than a metaphorical relation to the sublime. Despite Kant’s assertion that the sublime must be found in nature, his preliminary account of it focuses on architecture. Derrida notes that “even before the colossal rises up, and you already sense that it will be of stone, stony, petrified or petrifying, the two examples are of stone” (141). The first example draws on Savary’s description of the pyramids in order to evoke the distance from the object necessary to arrive at the fragile balance of perceptions (part and whole) the sublime requires.

The other "place of stone in the name of the Rock" (142) that serves as an example is St. Peter's in Rome: "This is what happens [. . .] when 'the spectator enters for the first time into the Church of St. Peter in Rome.' He is 'lost' or struck with 'stupor.' One would almost say turned to stone [*médusé*]: a moment ago outside, now inside the stony crypt" (142).[27] In both cases, the sublime informs the erection of an institution, pyramid or church, that is the site of a dead body, or a corpse, (and, in the latter case, of a body of texts or corpus), that serves as its foundation.

24. What is the relation of stone to writing and to allegorical writing in particular? The "colossal" (like the Medusa) alludes to pagan traditions, but St. Peter's participates in still other networks of allusion that bring writing to the fore. In relation to petrification in particular it suggests the tension between letter and spirit that structures the Christian allegoresis of Paul. In the introduction to *Acts of Religion*, Gil Anidjar recalls a wide range of Derrida's works that mention Paul or the opposition of letter and spirit (*Acts* 2).[28] In the same volume, in "A Silkworm of One's Own," Derrida stresses that Paul "thought he knew the literality of the letter. He prided himself on being able to distinguish, for the first time, he no doubt thought, wrongly, the circumcision of the heart, according to the breath and the spirit, from the circumcision of body or flesh, circumcision 'according to the letter'" *(Acts* 344). For Paul, the error of the Jews is that they read their Bible literally and assume that its law can save them. In contrast, the Christians read the same Bible spiritually, interpreting its law from the perspective of faith in Christ as its fulfillment.

25. Paul addresses his epistles to the Christians whom he also figures as texts, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (King James Version, 2 Cor. 3.3). The same living God who has written the Christian heart

    > […] also hath made us able ministers of the new testament: not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance [. . .] How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? (2 Cor. 3.6-8)

    Reading literally corresponds to writing in stone; it leads to petrification and death. Reading spiritually corresponds to writing in the heart; it leads to glory and eternal life. In effect, Pauline allegoresis prefigures the Kantian sublime because it teaches its readers to see *through* writing in order to internalize its truth as one's own spirit. For the Christian community it renders stone (at least partially) transparent and achieves a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament by positing the former as an Old (that is, newly interpretable) Testament homogeneous with the Christian mythos.[29] Following Paul, a long exegetical tradition in which Kant participates poses letter against spirit or external norms against internal authenticity. Stone becomes a crucial sign of the interpretive blindness to which any supposedly literal and legalistic system falls prey when it fails to read allegorically.

26. What I have described as Derrida's allegorical account of the university may seem to participate in the same tradition, but his point is, quite the contrary, that the allegorical *Chiffreschrift* cannot be spiritualized. Attention to the petrified architecture of the Kantian sublime disturbs the sublime recuperation of inwardness that Derrida refers to in "Economimesis" when he argues that "silence [that the sublime] imposes by taking the breath away and by preventing speech is less than ever heterogeneous to spirit and freedom" (as quoted above). From a certain perspective, Kant's trajectory remains in the direction of spirit and freedom. The preliminary architectural examples of the sublime give way to examples drawn from nature. The pyramids are transformed into pyramids of ice – a more reflective material than stone – as if to symbolize the reflexivity of sublime consciousness:

> […] true sublimity must be sought only in the mind [*im Gemüte*] of the judging person, not in the natural object, the judging of which prompts this mental attunement [*diese Stimmung*]. Indeed who would want to call sublime such things as shapeless mountain masses piled on one another in wild disarray, with their pyramids of ice [*Eispyramiden*], or the gloomy raging sea? But the mind feels elevated in its own judgment of itself when it contemplates these without concern for their form and abandons itself to the imagination and to a reason that has come to be connected with it – though quite without a determinate purpose, and merely expanding it – and finds all the might of the imagination still inadequate to reason's ideas. (113; 179)

Pyramids of ice ultimately reflect the light of the mind. The act of subreption through which one mistakenly assigns sublimity to nature rather than to one's own mind weaves an allegorical veil, a cipher or *Chiffreschrift*, over that light.

27. Like the pyramids, the stony sublimity of St. Peter's also gives way before its spiritualized double, though the sublime transformation figures elsewhere in Kant's writings than *The Critique of Judgment*. A "universal" and "invisible" church supplants the "church in the place of the rock" in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (105), a late work on the university and censorship which is the subject of an essay in *Droit*, "Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties."[30] As an institution whose canons are, as it were, written on the heart, the "universal (though invisible) church" (107) appears to resolve the opposition between the ersatz sublimity of external landscape and the authentic sublimity of internal worth. Authentic Christianity is universal; it testifies to "the God in us," for its basis is "drawn from man's own soul" (*Conflic*t 85; 105). Kant looks to Christ as the biblical example of this Christianity and its greatest teacher.[31] One must teach Christianity so that it "will really be present in the hearts of men" (95). Through his example, Christ teaches that man is capable of sacrificing his sensual nature to the demands of morality. He does not lay down the law, but creates a communion of moral beings by serving as their model. Kant is too careful to say what he nonetheless implies: what one worships in Christ is one's own freedom from external constraints. The entire passage is redolent with the vocabulary of the sublime. "*Bewunderung*," wonder (or, in Pluhar's translation, admiration) precisely characterizes sublime affect in Kant's "General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments" (*CJ* 133). The invisible church inspires the same "*Bewunderung*" and for much the same reason:

> For there is something in us that we cannot cease to wonder at [*bewundern*] [. . .] We do not wonder at the fact [*darum wündert man nicht*] that we are beings subject to moral laws and destined by our reason to obey them […] But we do wonder at our *ability* so to sacrifice our sensuous nature to morality[,] that we *can* do what we quite readily and clearly conceive that we *ought* to do. This ascendancy of the *supersensible* man in us over the *sensible*, such that (when it comes to a conflict between them) the sensible is *nothing*, though in its own eyes it is *everything*, is an object of the greatest *wonder* [*Bewunderung*] […] (105, Kant's emphasis)[32]

Christ exemplifies the moral law "so that we might make it our own – or rather, since it is already present in us by our moral predisposition, so that we might simply make room for it […] This teaching [. . .] works with divine power on all men's hearts [. . .] and unites them in one universal (though invisible) Church" (106).[33] In comparison, the grandest of religious monuments is a mere tourist attraction and the most learned of doctrines fanatical.

28. Only an invisible church can correspond to the spirituality of the sublime Kantian subject and institutionalize its fundamental inwardness. But an invisible institution can scarcely be considered an institution at all. Even for Kant, the invisible church is finally less an institution than the interior and

invisible reality of the institutions within which the university faculties, including theology and philosophy, must operate for the time being. It also serves as an implied ideal of the university of the future secreted within the pragmatic, institutional program offered by the text of *The Conflict of the Faculties*. An institution without institution – an institution "without condition" [34] because without external compulsion or law of any kind – it continues to serve as a model for the sublime fantasies of the university that Derrida investigates in "The Principle of Reason" and throughout *Droit*. From this perspective, the colossal exemplifies the stony institutional architecture from which spirit supposedly takes flight – or the heteronomy of writing. Petrified and petrifying, the sublime will have been written, in spite of itself, in tables of stone.

29. Derrida's insistence on the letter which is also the law (*droit*) of institutions is not so much opposed to the sublime as it is a recognition of its allegorical and ironic character as a way of speaking *otherwise*. In Theresa Kelley's words, "Allegory *is* alien; its ancient rhetorical status as 'other speech' survives all other adjustments. There is always an irreducible difference between allegorical representation and its referent [. . .]" (Kelley 5). In temporal terms (as I addressed in Part I), institutionalization petrifies the "chance of an instant" as a condition of duration in time, but in doing so it runs the risk of becoming a memorial to thinking rather than its occasion – a headstone on a grave as much as a barrier against the abyss. Derrida does not so much shuttle *between* these alternatives as show how at each and every instant they divide the texts and contexts that make up the university, including, if not especially, the faculty that make up its "teaching body."

30. The faculty features prominently in "Where a Teaching Body Begins and How it Ends." In French, the 'faculty' is the '*corps enseignant*' – translating literally, the "teaching body" (*Right I* 67-98) – and Derrida underlines its corporeal status. The opening session of a year-long seminar on the institutions of the teaching of philosophy, "Where a Teaching Body Begins" shows how the idealism of Kant's invisible church (supplemented by a tradition of Catholic clerical instruction) informs the project of secular education in France. In the documents Derrida considers, teaching appears as a quasi-clerical institution devoted to establishing a communion of educated beings. Like Kant's Christ, the exemplary teacher (re)produces learning by enabling students to uncover their own powers of (re)production or *auto*-didacticism. The task of the teaching body is to render itself superfluous. Like a pyramid of ice by sunlight, it should reflect the light of learning – and melt into air.

31. A certain superfluousness also informs Derrida's own teaching position at the time of the seminar when he was an *agrégé répétiteur* at the *École Normale Supérieur*. He describes at length his role preparing students for the *agrégation*, a competitive exam crucial to academic careers in France: "A repeater, the *agrégé répétiteur* should produce nothing, at least if to produce means to innovate, to transform, to bring about the new. He is destined to repeat and make others repeat, to reproduce and make others reproduce: forms, norms, and a content" (*Right I* 75). The model of teaching as repetition confirms the final superfluousness of the teaching body. The body of the teacher – which is to say, also the idiomatic character of his language – must not interfere with the student's internalization of a (self)-reproductive process. (Here as elsewhere I use the masculine pronoun deliberately. The historical model is male. Pedagogic reproduction takes place in the absence of a woman's body. Derrida cites the specifically clerical ideals espoused by Napoleon and other nineteenth-century theorists for whom the proper teaching body is single, celibate, and male. Teaching thus requires a "more or less constraining rule of ecclesiastic celibacy" [87].) Reading Condorcet's farewell letter to his onetime pupil the Prince of Parma, Derrida cites the tutor's final self-abnegating gesture: "'It's up to you, my lord, henceforth to instruct yourself all alone. I have already prepared you for this and even accustomed you to it'" (qtd. in *Right I* 86). The end of teaching is to show the student that he is always already his own teacher. The autonomy of a discipline (such as philosophy) corresponds to the autonomy of the subject. In a more contemporary idiom, one might say that the role of teaching is to empower students. Derrida's analysis compels one to consider how the language of empowerment may actually occlude structures and

effects of power.

32. “Where a Teaching Body Begins” concludes with a parodic vision of the transfigured body of the faculty as it undergoes effacement “by sublime annihilation” (*Right I*, 91): “My body is glorious. It gathers all the light. First of all, that of the spotlight above me. Then it is radiant and attracts all eyes. But it is also glorious in that it is no longer simply a body” (90). Derrida turns the theatrical spotlight of a classroom into the chrism of secular sainthood (and vice-versa). Becoming superfluous, the body becomes more than itself. As a *repeater*, it articulates a passage between the body of knowledge and the bodies of the teacher and students in the classroom – between the institutional authorities that underwrite knowledge and the here-and-now of teaching. Or, rather, it brings these very oppositions into being, without being identical to either of them. The institutions of knowledge do not precede (or belatedly befall) the body that they transfigure and divide.[35]

33. Initially, the process appears to be one of sublimation in which the glorious body is “a place of convergence and fascination,” (90) that is, the site of a symbolic communion:

> [My body] is also glorious in that it is no longer simply a body. It is sublimated [*il se sublime*] in the representation of at least one other body, the teaching body of which it should be at once a part and the whole, a member letting the gathering together of the body be seen; a body that in turn produces itself by erasing itself as the barely visible, entirely transparent representation of both the philosophical and the sociopolitical corpus, the contract between these bodies never being brought to the foreground. (*Right I* 90)

However violent, sublimation enables symbolization. The teaching body – Derrida’s body – serves as a synecdoche for the discipline it represents and for the university it inhabits; it is part of the whole for which it stands whether willingly or not. At an extreme, and like the body of Christ, it incarnates what it teaches. In more secular terms it becomes a symbol of learning which the student body consumes in order to internalize. The reference to synecdoche (a part standing for the whole) and the transparency of the sublimated body recalls not only Coleridge’s definition of the symbol as discussed by De Man in “The Rhetoric of Temporality” but Derrida’s discussion of the latter text in “Memoirs” (80ff.). But the symbol is, as it were, hollow. The extreme formulation of symbolic communion in the “glorious” teaching body is not only parodic – another “satire of the abyss” – but destructive. At its limit, sublimation collapses into “sublime annihilation” and exposes a heterogeneity that symbolization cannot overcome. The teaching body appears as a form in which the incommensurability of letter and spirit – the inexorable remainder of Pauline allegoresis – gives itself to be read. As Derrida summarizes De Man on Coleridge: “Allegory speaks (through) the voice of the other, whence the ghost-effect, whence also the a-symbolic disjunction” (*Memoirs* 80). Sublime annihilation is the site of asymbolic disjunction.

34. How does this disjunction disclose itself? The bodily erasure “always takes the form of a cadaverization of my body. My body only fascinates while playing dead, the moment when, playing dead, it is erected in the rigidity of the cadaver: stiff but without strength proper. Having no life of its own but only a delegation of life” (91). As a delegate of life, the body represents life in its absence. Derrida insists that the erasure leaves no (readable or unreadable) trace in its wake. He is not describing a layering of textualities, one body of writing superimposed on another. Erasure is complete: “erasure makes disappear, by sublime annhilation, the particular characteristics of a *facies* and of everything in the face that cannot be reduced to the vocable and audible.”[36] As symbolic communion, education ostensibly bases itself on what is spoken and heard, for the ghostly inwardness of spirit passes through vibrations of sound that impregnate (like the holy spirit) through the ear. At the same time, as sublime annihilation, education also erects (what remains of) the body as a rigid corpse, the bearer of literal exteriority – the exteriority of the letter – hardened into stone. Unknown to itself, communion is bodily:

"All the rhetorics of this cadaverizing erasure, then, are body-to-body relations" (91).[37]

35. The teaching body is discontinuous with the institution it only supposedly *em*bodies. At the cost of its own petrification, it allegorizes what it repeats. Sublime annihilation produces the allegory of the university: its other speaking. It erects the colossus of the university *as if* its truth were purely internal, spiritual, ideal – *as if* the university were an invisible church. And it reproduces itself in the body of the student *as if* the telos of learning were to become one's own teacher. On the one hand, the 'as if' cannot entirely subsume the corporeal literality underwriting it. On the other (and as in Derrida's treatment of the sublime), corporeality cannot simply undo the powers of idealization. Rather, Derrida's concern with the "body to body" attends to the heteronomy of all acts of institution – whether they idealize or, for that matter, demystify idealization in language that remains in thrall to the idealism it negates. (For an example of the latter, one need only recall what Derrida writes about the inadequacy of sociological and political critique.) Most importantly, it suggests the impossibility of arriving at an *end* to teaching or, if one prefers, an end to learning. No-one ever becomes his own teacher – even if he or she happens to get paid for teaching others.

36. In the university, behind the annhilated *facies* that Derrida evokes, one senses the pressure of the *facies hippocratica*, the freezing lineaments on the face of someone who has only just died, who is – just barely – a corpse. For Benjamin, in *The Origin of the German Mourning Play*, the *facies hippocratica* is the stony face of allegory: "in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death's head" (Benjamin 166). Drawing the line between *facies* and *facies hippocratica*, sublime annihilation testifies to the violence of allegory. Again, in Benjamin's words, "the greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance" (166). In "Privilege" Derrida recalls Benjamin's writing on allegory as an example of all that the university at one time felt bound to exclude as untimely, sorrowful, and unsuccessful:

> [. . .] the University of Frankfurt is not only the institution that refused to confer the title Doctor of Philosophy upon Walter Benjamin, but it is *also* that [. . .] Would so many of us recognize Hans Cornelius's name if a certain editor's note at the end of Benjamin's complete works were not dedicated to this event, exemplary in so many ways – the rejection of *The Origin of the German Mourning Play* as a thesis for the *Habilitation*? (*Right I* 6)

37. Allegory may also be read as a stand in for the wider problem that Benjamin names in the opening sentence of his (once unacceptable) *Habilitation* thesis. What disturbs the trajectory of philosophy towards finished "doctrine" *is* "philosophical writing:" "It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation [*Darstellung*]" (27; 9). Like Benjamin before him, Derrida writes from an awareness of the peculiar milieu in which philosophy risks itself in order to (re)present itself: "Philosophy would be what wants to keep, by declaring it, this ultimate or initial privilege that consists in *exposing* its own privilege: to danger [*à la menace*] or presentation, sometimes to the risk of presentation" (*Right I* 2). In (re)presentation – as in repetition, as in teaching, as in institution – all of the forms that constitute philosophy (as if) from inside simultaneously threaten it (as if) from outside.[38] In Derrida's formulations, a sense of *menace* or dread inevitably hangs over philosophy. As the philosophical institution par excellence, the university follows suit. It is "at once menaced and menacing [*à la fois menacé et menaçant*]" (*Right II* 90, translation modified; 406). Menace may well inspire "a certain terror" but it also signals the chance for the event of thought as the chance for a future. In its allegorization of the sublime, Derrida's writing takes that chance.

III. At Once Menaced and Menacing

38. According to a computer search of an online version of *Du Droit à la Philosophie*, the word "*menace*" or some grammatical variant of it, appears twenty two times in the text.[39] Eight of these appearances occur in the preface, "Privilege," including one each on its first and last page. To cite a few quite varied examples: the stability of institutional arrangements supportive of new work (such as the *Collège International de Philosophie*) are "relative, menaced [*menacés*], essentially precarious" (*Right I* 10; 23); philosophy traditionally supposes that institutional interventions can only "at most [. . .] menace the public exercise [. . .] of philosophy [*à la limite menacer l'exercice (publique) [. . .] de la philosophie*];" (24; 43); the government's plan for educational reform "menaced [*était des plus menaçants*]" (196; 44); one must find a way to question philosophical norms "without menacing [*sans menacer*] the critical ideal of science and philosophy" (66; 107). (In all of these examples – and in those cited below – the English version translates "menace" as "threaten." I have revised the translations to clarify my argument as I address the difference between the two words below.)

39. The frequent and various uses of menace suggest an enterprise haunted by unnameable dangers and well-qualified to provoke the terrors of the sublime: "nothing in this domain [of 'university responsibility'] seems certain to me. Everything seems obscure, enigmatic, at once menaced and menacing, in a place where the greatest danger today is concentrated" (*Right II* 90, translation modified). In the context of the sublime "in the Kantian sense," menace belongs to the affective realm of the dynamically sublime: "When in an aesthetic judgment we consider nature as a might that has no dominance over us, then it is dynamically sublime [. . . and] we must present it as arousing fear." One judges the object as arousing fear, though one is not actually afraid of it: "we merely *think* of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would in that case be utterly futile" (*CJ* 120). In the dynamically sublime, one experiences the other's power without being under its sway. The result is pleasure, a sense of wonder (*Bewunderung*) at discovering in oneself a quality superior to something that threatens (mere) sensory destruction. Like the biblical Christ, the dynamically sublime reminds the subject of its capacity to choose reason and the moral law over nature and personal desire. It recalls the subject to its freedom.[40]

40. For Derrida terror does not resolve itself into the subject's freedom, but his use of the word "*menacer*" and its variants nonetheless encodes the sublime in his text in a way that the usual translation of *menacer* as "threaten" in the English translation of *Droit* partly obscures. "Threaten" brings with it much the same meaning as "menace" but not the same etymological texture. The French verb *menacer* derives from the late Latin *minaciare* and classical Latin *minaciae*, which both refer to verbal threats of injury or harm.[41] But these words, in turn, derive from *minæ*, a word for overhanging mountain peaks and, by extension, any threatening overhang, as in "the ridgy steep/Of some loose hanging rock" where danger, as Collins writes, "stalks his round, an hideous form." [42] "Menace" thus provides a constant trace of the sublime within the text of *Droit* and, more particularly, of the literal or embodied sublime landscape that, for Kant, is – in its sublimity – an effect of subreption. Derrida never mentions this etymology of which he may or may not be aware, but it operates a subterranean relay between the illegitimate assignment of the sublime to an object and the invocation of a future whose "terrifying forms" (as Derrida writes in "Structure, Sign, and Play") remain unnameable.[43] Menace necessarily involves (re)presentation and the dangers it poses to any philosophy that would, to recall Benjamin, set itself up as *doctrine* rather than *writing*. (*Of Grammatology* posits a similar configuration – some version of which may be traced throughout Derrida's writing: "Metaphysics has constituted an exemplary defense against the menace of writing [*la menace de l'écriture*]" [101; 149].)

41. At times, Derrida uses the word "menace" to name threats to philosophy and its institutions that appear as if from outside whether in the form of institutional norms or government policies. At others, he does

so to name threats that appear as if from within traditional disciplinary formations. He even ventriloquizes the rhetoric of deconstruction *menacing* the humanities while indicating that deconstruction also experiences itself as *menaced*. Thus, "The Principle of Reason" recalls that "the approach I am advocating here is often felt by certain guardians [*tenants*] of the 'humanities' or of the positive sciences as a menace [*comme une menace*] (*Right II* 147; 487). But the approach Derrida is "advocating" is menaced in its turn:

> These new responsibilities cannot be purely academic. If they remain extremely difficult to assume, extremely precarious and menaced [*précaire et menacées*], it is because they must at once keep alive the memory of a tradition and make an opening beyond any program, that is, toward what is called the future. (149; 489)

From a polemical perspective, the two cases may appear to be quite different. The aporias of the (nonprogrammatic) program of deconstruction genuinely threaten its institution as a program, whereas "certain guardians of the 'humanities'" merely *feel* threatened by what they imagine to be the external danger of deconstruction. In the latter case, a defensive claim to guardianship generates the need, even the desire, for an external menace. But the two experiences of menace at least threaten to collapse into one all-pervasive experience haunting the history of philosophy. In the face of any apparent exteriority or alterity, which is to say, in the face of futurity, philosophy erects institutions that aspire to be free of menace – to rise sublimely above it. The 'real' menace to philosophy encompasses both the experience of *and* the reaction to menace, both the threatening abyss and the defensive barrier. De Man's formula concerning the resistance to theory offers an analogue: "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory, since theory *is* itself this resistance" (*The Resistance to Theory* 19). Philosophy cannot overcome the menace to philosophy, since it is itself this menace. It is itself the (act of) institution in which it defends itself *and* brings itself to ruin. In other words, philosophy cannot overcome the menace of (re)presentation and its institutions. It must risk presentation, since it cannot defend itself, even for an instant, without taking that risk. But, in doing so, it institutes itself in the name of everything it aims to exclude. It becomes, as Simon Wortham has written, a *counter*-institution.[44]

42. Deconstruction, whatever it *does* name, does *not* name a power to escape this double bind or its risks. [45] Derrida punctuates his project for the *Collège Internationale de Philosophie* with reminders of the fearful power of petrification as the condition of all sublime institutional exaltation including its own (cf. *Right II* 216ff.). In "Mochlos," as if to exemplify the danger, Derrida recalls Heidegger's 1933 rectoral address at Freiburg, "The Self-Affirmation of the German University." Heidegger's speech is

> the last great discourse in which the Western university tries to think its essence and its destination in terms of responsibility, with a stable reference to the same idea of knowledge, technics, the State, and the nation [as Schelling, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Humboldt, Hegel], very close to a limit at which the memorial gathering of a thinking makes a sudden sign toward the entirely-other of a terrifying future [*un avenir terrifiant*]. (*Right II* 88)

A certain terror erupts on the page and, with it, the double bind of a certain deconstruction: one is terrified of going beyond the limits of reason and history, of plunging into the abyss, but one is just as terrified of not going beyond the limits, of erecting a barrier before the future, restricting oneself to a law or "*droit*" made of stone. Derrida's revisionary relation to the sublime reads and writes the double-bind as an allegory of the sublime, the story of an im-properly sublime institution.

43. As the very word "menace" implies, the story has not yet come to its conclusion. A "menace" is a speech act whose temporality is directed towards the future both in *what* it threatens and in *that* it threatens. Its description of the future tries to make something happen in the present, and its success by

no means depends on the accuracy of the description. On the contrary: uncertainty makes menace all the more menacing. Uncertainty *itself* menaces. Menace thus functions as an anti-redemptive promise. It counters even as it converges with the quasi-messianic promise invoked in Derrida's final formal statement on the university: "The University Without Condition."[46] Derrida describes this text as a "profession of faith." It links the profession and the professoriate to the performativity of the promise that every profession of faith implies:

> 'To make profession of' is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one's word and believe this declaration. I insist on this performative value of the declaration that professes while promising. One must underscore that constative utterances and discourses of pure knowledge, in the university or elsewhere, do not belong as such, to the order of the profession in the strict sense. (*Without Alibi* 214-215)

Both promise and menace are performative. They act in and as language. *Littré* defines the verb *menacer* as "*frapper de menace*" – to strike with a menace. But the "*menace*" with which it strikes may itself be a matter of mere words or signification: "*Parole ou geste dont on se sert pour faire craindre à quelqu'un le mal qu'on lui prépare*" (a word or gesture which one uses to make someone fear the evil one is preparing for him). As in the English word "menace" (and also the English word "threat"), the French "*menace*" is ambiguously poised between word and act, constative and performative, present and future – menacing these very oppositions with undecidability. Menace hovers in the twilight temporality of an 'as if': what may or may not occur, what may or may not be a danger, what may or may not be a speech act. For all these reasons, it may provoke a touch of paranoia – the interpretive equivalent of a plunge into the abyss.[47]

44. In their own performative power, Derrida's writings in *Droit* (and elsewhere) show other – less destructive, less fantasmatic – ways to take on the terrors of academic responsibility. In "Punctuations," the opening statement of his thesis defense, terror converges with joy much as menace converges with promise. (At least, perhaps it does; as long as the future is at stake, one can never be sure.) Derrida concludes "Punctuations" by casting aside defenses and seeming to let his guard down. He once again recalls Hyppolite's response to "Structure, Sign, and Play" – "'I really do not see where you are going'" – and assumes it as a task. Terror before the unknown is not necessarily best answered or best withstood by a sublime subject standing with the immobile fixity of a statue or, what may amount to the same thing, the disciplined violence of a soldier. Derrida suggests another response – mobile, vulnerable, exposed – which is at once the promise and the menace of an institution that knows no terror:

> The strategy without any goal – for this is what I hold to and what in turn holds me – the aleatory strategy of someone who admits that he does not know where he is going. This, then, is not after all an undertaking of war or a discourse of belligerence. I would like it also to be like a headlong flight straight toward the end, a joyous self-contradiction, a disarmed desire, that is to say, something very old and very cunning, but that also has just been born and that delights in being without defense. (*Right II* 128)

Notes

1 I wish to thank J. Jennifer Jones for conceiving this volume of *Romantic Praxis* and to thank Cathy Caruth and Brian McGrath for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I also wish to acknowledge a debt to Jan Plug's editorial apparatus to the two volume translation of *Du Droit à la Philosophie*. The translation appears as *Who's Afraid of Philosophy: Right to Philosophy I* and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy II*. I will refer to these volumes as *Right I* and *Right II.* Additionally, for purposes of clarity I refer to works

by Derrida, Kant, and De Man by title (rather than date) or as follows: Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* as *Truth* and *Acts of Religion* as *Acts*; Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* as *CJ* and *The Conflict of the Faculties* as *Conflict*. For quotes from French or German, the page number always follows that of the English translation.

2 Offering a synoptic account of his writings between 1963 and 1968, Derrida notes that, "All of this was grouped together under the title of *deconstruction*, the graphics of *différance*, of the trace, the supplement and so forth…" (*Right II* 119, Derrida's emphasis). One could write at length on Derrida's different deployments of the word "deconstruction" throughout his work, especially as the word comes increasingly to refer *to* his work and its institutionalization within the academy. Cf. Kamuf, 9-10.

3 On childbirth as a figure for futurity in "Structure, Sign, and Play" and its relation to the (a)teleological movement of philosophy, see Bennington 2000, 4ff.

4 Following Derrida's lead, commentators have correctly underlined the connections between his philosophical and institutional commitments. See, for example, the introduction to Wortham and, more recently, and in a different vein, Rajan. Rajan argues that "the writings on the university [. . .] are the culmination of an underground dialogue between Derrida and Foucault that marks deconstruction, in the broadly interdisciplinary and epistemic rather than literary mode I have outlined in my book *Deconstruction and the Remainders of Phenomenology* (1-4, 23-33), as a large scale reorganization of knowledge" (134-135).

5 As Peggy Kamuf points out, "the university" is something of a fiction; one can only speak "as if there were one selfsame University, which is obviously an untenable confusion of a multifarious thing with this single name" (3).

6 Derrida concludes the preface to *Droit* with a brief consideration of Bourdieu that focuses on the normativity implicit in his critique of the academy.

7 From a certain perspective, Kant also addresses a void 'within' reason or, rather, a void that divides its operations: "The great gulf that separates the supersensible from appearances completely cuts off the domain of the concept of nature under the one legislation, and the domain of the concept of freedom under the other legislation from any influence that each (according to its own basic laws) might have had on the other" (35). The *Critique of Judgment* aims to "to throw a bridge from one domain to another" (36). (Kant's vocabulary of the "gulf" and "bridge" is taken up in Derrida's discussion of the Cornell landscape discussed below.)

8 "Menace," like "terror," can be read across the entirety of Derrida's oeuvre. My essay limits itself primarily to *Droit* with some attention to Derrida's other writings on Kant and the university.

9 As Rajan writes: "More than anyone, it is through Kant, the civil-servant philosopher, that Derrida thinks the university inside and ouside the conditions of its function" (147).

10 Derrida refers to Kant's "General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments" (*CJ* 126). The translators of "Economimesis" use J. H. Bernard's translation of *The Critique of Judgment*.

11 See, for example, De Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (70-90) and Lyotard "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (71-82). In a recent essay, addressing related issues, Ian Balfour shows how psychological appropriations of Kantian "subjectivity" fundamentally misread it. He suggests that "subjecticity" may be a more useful way to refer to the "order of the subject" in Kant (and related romantic texts) as the word "subjectivity" increasingly comes "with the considerable baggage of psychologism" ("Subjecticity" 1).

12 In addition to the normativity of the sublime, Derrida may be uneasy with its "univerticality," a term I

take from Chris Fynsk. Fynsk writes that Derrida poses "a challenge to the entire 'univertical' ordering of knowledge in the space of the *universitas* [which] obliges philosophy (or the thought that would succeed it) to entertain an open set of *transversal* relations with emergent forms of knowledge and their technical elaborations […] [W]e find a call for *translation* and *transference* – multiple passages (of thought) across institutional boundaries and into entirely new problematics and institutional (or extrainstitutional) spaces" (26). Fynsk does not discuss the sublime here, but his remarks have a bearing on it as the sublime originally refers to height or *hypsos* (Longinus's term): metaphorically speaking, it looks 'down' and 'over.'

13 For a dissertation to be acceptable, its readers have to be able to recognize it *as* new. The unrecognizable – which is to say, the authentically new – does not pass muster, as Walter Benjamin, for one, discovered. Further on I discuss Derrida's reflections on the rejection of Benjamin's *Habilitation* thesis.

14 In *Solitude and the Sublime*, Frances Ferguson emphasizes Kant's insistence "upon sublime aesthetic experience as the communication of intentionlessness" (4). Ferguson's book takes issue with the deconstructive reading of Kant which informs my discussion here partly because of what she considers its "crypto-empiricism" (ix). She includes thoughtful though brief reflections on "Parergon" in her criticisms of deconstruction (20f., 78f., 92f.). Yet if one reads the "parergon" (as Ferguson does not) as a way of thinking the installation or formation of form that is itself neither empirical nor formal, then Derrida's discussion may not be without affinities to her account of Kantian formalism as enabling "the deduction of possibilities not necessarily available to the senses" (23). Cf. Cheetham on the importance of the imposition of limits and borders in both *The Critique of Judgment* and "Parergon."

15 Cf. Derrida's reflections on how difficult it is for Kant to maintain the purity of his own examples of the sublime. (*Truth* 122).

16 Thomas Pfau suggests that the sublime is, at it were, inherently ironic, an affectation of affect, "essentially notional and figural" (43), that replaces the failure of authentic feeling with the "simulacrum of a feeling, 'respect:'" "The content of sublime feeling is, if anything, a negative one – a feeling that should routinely occur suddenly fails to do so and, in response to that traumatic rupture, the subject 'affects' the notion of reason *as* a (quasi-) 'feeling' of its own 'supersensible destination'" (41, 40). Therefore, "rationality constitutes itself as a self-authorizing and self-generating fantasy" (40).

17 The "ridiculous" or "*lächerlich*" desire to see the something beyond the bounds of sensibility may seem to prefigure aspects of Žižek's account of the "ridiculous sublime." In *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, he describes how the literalization or actualization of fantasy works to undo its "spectral aura:" the postmodern femme fatale thwarts desire by granting it (11). But the "ridiculous sublime" specifically associated (in Žižek's argument) with Lynch's utterly serious stagings of "the most ridiculously pathetic scenes" (22) poses somewhat different problems than Kant's fanaticism.

18 For a somewhat different account of the role of landscape in Derrida's Cornell lecture, see Trifonas 99ff.

19 A number of critics have written about the rhetorical character of subreption. In Ian Balfour's words, "it is an abuse of language, a catachresis, even to call any object sublime" (6). Gayatri Spivak describes subreption similarly as a "metalepsis" (11). She also shows that subreption remains normative for the sublime despite being in error: "Our access to morality is operated by rhetoric and clandestinity" (12). The one who falls outside of normativity altogether, foreclosed by sublimity (and subjectivity), is the "*rohe*" or raw man – that is the figure of the primitive non-European who cannot *even* mistake the sublime as an object, but is merely terrified by it (11ff.). Her reading confirms that subreption coheres with the order of the institution. On the Kantian sublime and presentation cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," especially 46-49.

20 Because the two 'reflections' differ, this "thinking" is not the infinite reflexivity that literary history

traditionally associates with Jena romanticism. For a helpful discussion of Derrida and the problem of 'bad infinity,' that also addresses the charge that deconstruction is a "crypto-empiricism," see Düttmann. (Cf. note 14 above.)

21 Derrida alludes to De Man's reading of Stendhal in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" which describes Stendhal as "a full-fledged ironist as well as an allegorist [who] has to seal, so to speak, the ironic moments within the allegorical duration" (*Blindness and Insight* 227).

22 Cf. Derrida on the "crisis of crisis:" "you can see that the two occurrences of the word are merely homonyms here: 'crisis' does not have the same meaning twice" (*Right I* 102).

23 In De Man's reading of the Kantian sublime, its narrative articulations are interrupted by "the prosaic materiality of the letter" (*Aesthetic Ideology*, *90*) and the Kantian allegory of the faculties exists side by side with a "materiality of sublime vision [. . .] entirely devoid of teleological interference" (83; quoted out of order). In the context I am addressing here, Lytotard's way of posing the issue resonates more clearly with Derrida's and with Kant's.

24 Cf. De Man's account of the difficulty defining allegory in "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion" (1): "Allegory is sequential and narrative, yet the topic of its narration is not necessarily temporal at all, thus raising the question of the referential status of a text whose semantic function, though strongly in evidence, is not primarily determined by mimetic moments; more than ordinary modes of fiction, allegory is at the furthest possible remove from historiography."

25 Cf. Dawn McCance's book on Derrida and the university, *Medusa's Ear*: *University Foundings from Kant to Chora L.* Drawing on the work of Lynn Enterline, McCance argues that the Medusa is an image of threatening deafness and muteness before which the university withdraws into its own petrification: "[…] the modern university is petrified. It needs to be shaken – solicited into movement – […]" (4). McCance does not address the sublime or the Pauline tradition of allegoresis (and does not seem concerned with the actual figuration of the Medusa in the texts she treats), but her larger argument intersects with mine. (For a reading of the Medusa as a relay for the Pauline tradition in Dante's *Inferno* see Freccero 119-135.)

26 The *OED* defines a colossus as "a statue or image of the human form of large dimensions." Citing Jean-Pierre Vernant, Derrida emphasizes that the word did not originally carry any reference to size (120).

27 The translators of *The Truth in Painting* use James Creed Meredith's translation of *The Critique of Judgment*.

28 See *Of Spirit* for Derrida's extended encounter with "spirit" as refracted through Heidegger.

29 On letter and spirit in Paul de Man, see my introduction to *Romantic Returns* (White 20ff.). Scholars debate the precise nature of Paul's relation to the letter – to what degree he admits it into his system in a dialectic of letter and spirit and to what degree he rejects it altogether (see, for example, Boyarin 97-105). According to Cassirer, Kant experienced the pietistic sect within which he was raised as still too literal, a prototype for "the regulation and mechanization of religious life" (16) that he opposes.

30 In "Mochlos" Derrida does not discuss Kant's evocation of the invisible church.

31 Derrida points out that in Kant one cannot teach someone to be a philosopher anymore than one can teach someone to be an artist. One can only exemplify the philosophical project (*Right II* 60ff.). Christ, too, *exemplifies*.

32 I quote from Mary Gregor's bilingual edition. The German text can be found opposite the English.

33 Paul notwithstanding, the best prefiguration of an invisible church may well turn out to be a church that believes in an invisible god:

> Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth etc. This commandment can alone explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in its civilized era felt for its religion when it compared itself with other peoples, or can explain the pride that Islam inspires. The same holds also for our presentation of the moral law, and for the predisposition within us for morality. (*CJ* 135)

In "Parergon," Derrida describes "a certain Judaism" as "the historical figure of sublime irruption" in Kant and Hegel (134).

34 I allude to Derrida's later "profession of faith" concerning the university: "The University Without Condition" (*Without Alibi* 202). On the "without condition" see, too, note 43.

35 Wortham offers a helpful discussion of this passage that reads it in conjunction with the figure of the flower and the anthology in *Glas* (Wortham 77ff., 84). Another passage in *Glas* that bears consideration in this context is its commentary on the "*élève*" (student), the "*relève*" (Derrida's translation of Hegel's *Aufhebung*) and the sequence of words associating the student with *up*bringing or height (*élévation*) (*Glas* 23). Cf. *Truth* which cites the "*élève*" of *Glas* in its discussion of the sublime (123).

36 The privilege of the vocable and the audible in the scene of teaching is also the burden of Derrida's "Otobiographies" which addresses Nietzsche's lectures "On the Future of Our Educational Institutions" (*The Ear of the Other* 3-38). Cf. McCance's concern with the figure of the deaf and dumb Medusa as the abject "othered-body" from which the philosopher and the university recoil (4).

37 Derrida returns to the sublime teaching body in a discussion of Kant in "Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality." Kant's philosopher teaches a discipline that (like the moral law and like art) cannot be taught. The resultant double bind *absents* the body:

> It would be enough, if one might say so, to draw the institutional consequences from this. They result from this double bind that knots itself around the sublime body of the teacher of philosophizing, of his evident and unavoidable absence. For in his very withdrawal he remains unavoidable. He haunts the scene more than he dominates it; he dominates it, indeed, as would a phantom. One could say that he fascinates […] (*Right II* 62)

On the phantom or ghost in Derrida as it informs the institutions of "theory" and "romanticism," see the recent essays by Simpson and Wang.

38 In "Towards a Critique of Violence" Benjamin addresses the risks of institution in the sphere of law (Benjamin 277-300; I have slightly modified the translation of the essay's title.) Cf. my discussion of the Benjamin in White 2009.

39 In "Derrida's 'Eighteenth Century'" Geoffrey Bennington discusses Derrida's response to the word "menace" in Foucault. Foucault refers to the "*Malin Génie*" as a "*menace perpétuelle*" to Descartes' cogito (390). Bennington relates this perpetual menace to the nexus of reading and autoimmunity in Derrida's later work: "this auto-immunity is just what I call reading, as what opens texts up always beyond their historical specificity to the always possibly menacing prospect of unpredictable future reading" (392).

40 Cf. *CJ* 120f. (with Pluhar's modifications):

> It reveals in us at the same time an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature, and reveals in us a superiority over nature that is the basis of a self-preservation quite different in kind from the one that can be assailed and endangered by nature outside us. This keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded, even though a human being would have to succumb to that dominance [of nature]. Hence if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength (which does not belong to nature [within us]), to regard as small the [objects] of our [natural] concerns: property, health, and life, and because of this we regard nature's might (to which we are indeed subjected in these [natural] concerns) as yet not having such dominance over us as persons, that we should have to bow to it if our highest principles were at stake and we had to choose between upholding or abandoning them.

41 For "*menacer*" here and later in the essay, I draw on *Littré*, *Le Petit Robert*, Picoche, and Walde.

42 See Collins, "Ode to Fear" lines 10-15.

43 As always, Derrida retains a certain distance from the traditional sublime, as if remaining wary of its normative or subjectivizing dimension. So, for example, in the metaphorical opening of "Vacant Chair: Censorship, Mastery, Magisteriality," the mountain overhang or "ridgy steep" is, like Cornell's abyss, seductive but misleading:

> At this point we begin a second journey. No more so than the first will this one lead us toward an overhanging edge [*quelque ligne surplombante*] from which we could dominate the totality of an epoch or a historical territory. It will be a question of situating some significant points of reference in order to measure a displacement or the transformation of a problematic. This presupposes strategic choices and risks on our part. (*Right II* 43).

Despite the reserve towards the sublime, the text continues to urge *risk* – risk that is elsewhere signaled by the word "menace".

44 On the role of anxiety and defensiveness in the constitution of the professions cf. Sam Weber "The Limits of Professionalism" which Derrida discusses briefly in "The Principle of Reason." Cf., too, Weber, "The Vaulted Eye: Remarks on Knowledge and Professionalism" and "The Future of the University: The Cutting Edge." These essays all appear in the expanded edition of Weber, *Institution and Interpretation*.

45 Terdiman's partly sympathetic critique of Derrida's later essay on the university, "The University Without Condition," suggests that in this essay, at least, Derrida aspires to such an escape. I note here only that the later essay refers at crucial points to Derrida's earlier writings on the university in a way that I think modifies its seemingly more utopian claims and that Terdiman does not address. I read the "without condition" as another invocation of the ironic instant that, sealed within the allegory of the institution, interrupts its duration but never simply or finally overturns it. Cf., too, Kamuf, 6: "deconstructive thought, as purveyed especially by the writings of Derrida [. . .] never took it upon itself to leave the university behind, move beyond it, or still less denounce it *qua* institution. Rather, as institution, the university is being thought here in its historicity as a stabilizable but essentially and necessarily unstable formation, open to a future, that is, to deconstruction."

46 In several texts, Derrida remarks the relation of the promise to both the messianic and the menacing. See, for example, in "Marx and Sons," the reference to the "threatening promise" that "organizes *every* speech act" and intersects with "the horizon of awaiting [*attente*] that informs our relationship to time – to the event, to that which happens [*ce qui arrive*], to the one who arrives [*l'arrivant*] and to the other" (251; translator's brackets).

47 Cf. Derrida's (perhaps playful) description of himself as he prepares for a lecture: "I feel like a hunted animal looking in darkness for a way out when none is to be found. Every exit is blocked." (*Right II* 132). A fuller development of Derrida's relation to paranoia would need to consider not only his writings on psycho-analysis but his writings on politics and auto-immunity.

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The Sublime and Education

Unlearning the Sublime

Christopher Braider, University of Colorado, Boulder

1. Tracking the arguments of Milton's prose has been compared to watching a man jump up and down in place in an ecstasy of impotent rage. However hard Milton tries, however passionately he presses, he never gets anywhere, forever stuck in search of the knock-out blow he never manages to deliver. The reason is that, at bottom, Milton has only one thing to say, endlessly repeated in different words: his unshakeable conviction of the rightness of his cause, and his equally unshakeable conviction that his adversaries could not fail to see it if they would only open their eyes. The argument is thus always the same, as is Milton's fury at his adversaries' willful failure to grasp it.[1]

2. It strikes me that this is also a good picture of what talking about the sublime is like. As we will see more specifically later, it is important that the sublime has a history: having a history turns out in fact to be characteristic of it in a way it does not in the cognate cases of the beautiful or the true.[2] For one thing, talk of the sublime is notoriously dateable, tracing back to the late antiquity of pseudo-Longinus' *Peri hypsous*,[3] to be born again with Nicolas Boileau's *Traité du sublime* of 1674. Moreover, in the radically modern sense that comes into focus just when the modern theory of the sublime reaches a critical watershed in the transition from the Kantian Enlightenment to the Romantic age, history itself is at once a distinctive product and a powerful medium of sublimity. History indeed, as moderns understand it, is a concept which is not only sublime in its own right but one that demands a prior position, a location in mental space, the sublime maps out for it.[4] Still, whenever we find ourselves talking about the sublime, it is as though we had never talked about anything else. More pointedly, it is as though we *ought* never to have talked about anything else, so compulsory does the topic feel. The result is that, exactly like Miltonic argument, talk of the sublime never gets anywhere. It is not just that it constantly circles back to the same place, the topos or locus in pseudo-Longinus to which Boileau returns in reviving the debate. The underlying argument is always the same; we simply rephrase it in search of the knock-out blow that constantly eludes us.

3. My goal in the following essay is to suggest that there is in fact a way forward and that, to secure it, it suffices to ask why it has proved so hard to find. What is there about the sublime that leaves us jumping up and down in place? My answer is, the sublime itself. I have in mind here a saying left us by a philosopher who was himself something of an adept of the sublime and so, like all such, a hostage to it, Ludwig Wittgenstein. The face the sublime wore for him was philosophy's—more properly, and from the standpoint of the diagnosis undertaken here, more symptomatically, it was the face presented by the *limits* of philosophy. Wittgenstein took these limits to coincide now with those of the world, now with those of our language about the world, and now with those of such thought as language makes possible. But in each case the crucial thing was the fact of limits as such, and the puzzle this poses: in order to think about the world or language or thought itself, we would have to stand on both sides of the limits it describes, which we can't.[5] Wittgenstein said that philosophy's aim is "[t]o shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." (103) Like Wittgenstein's fly, making his version of the Platonic myth of the cave more potent than the original, we are blinded by the *transparency* of the trap to the fact that, hard as we look, nothing is actually hidden: the way to get out is simply to use the way in. I will argue that the way forward with the sublime is to take the way back out; and what will enable me to make this case is the pedagogical theme the present collection addresses.

* * *

4. According to Kant, a distinctive feature of judgments of the sublime is that they need no "deduction," that is, no transcendental justification of the claim to objective universality and truth they share with the experience of beauty (*Critique of Judgment*, 141-42). Like "judgments of taste," whose province is the beautiful, the experience of the sublime is self-announcing in that the judgment we form and the phenomenon that occasions it are coterminous. A flower, landscape, or sunset is beautiful only insofar as the "liking" of which beauty is the predicate finds it so or, playing on the verbal root of Kant's term for "liking," *Wohlgefallen*, only insofar as it happens to fall out that way. Similarly, the might of a waterfall or storm at sea, the magnitude of the pyramids or eternity, or the act of heroic self-sacrifice a soldier performs in going coolly about his duty in the face of violent death (121-22) are sublime only insofar as some witness sees them in that light. The feeling such spectacles evoke (or at least appear to evoke) constitutes them *in* their sublimity *as being* sublime even though, in themselves, they are nothing of the sort.

5. However, unlike judgments of taste, the experience of the sublime is self-ratifying as well: the "mere exposition" of the thing does double duty as the proof of its universal validity and reach. To be sure, in a conscientious logical kink typical of Kant, though judgments of the sublime need no justification, the fact that they need none does. Accordingly, he not only adduces the fact but goes on to "derive" it by drawing a distinction (another typically Kantian move) between the faculties to which the beautiful and sublime respectively appeal (142-43). If judgments of taste require a deduction, it is because they are about the things to which they attach the predicate of beauty. Despite the constitutive role mere pleasure plays in the experience, the beautiful appeals to concepts of the understanding whose business is knowledge rather than pleasure. This is true even if the judgments involved are condemned to remain merely "reflective," setting concepts in a state of free and so indeterminate "play" to which there can be no logical end. The appeal to the understanding persists, moreover, even if it is a matter of empirical record that no two respondents are bound to agree, as in fact they regularly and visibly do not. By contrast, the experience of the sublime appeals to the faculty of moral (practical) reason. As such, it has —and, what is more, can have—no objective correlative. Though mediated by an external occasion, its true object is not the occasion as such but what the occasion brings to awareness in the form of a contingent experience, namely, the supersensible ground of experience itself. More specifically, it spotlights the *moral* ground of experience in practical reason and the moral *vocation* this enjoins in defiance of knowledge and pleasure alike. As Kant puts it in the "general comment," where he recapitulates his views about aesthetic reflective judgments in advance of the work of deduction immediately to follow, "The beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without interest; the sublime, for esteeming it even against our interest (of sense)" (127).

6. To put the case in a way designed to bring out still further conditioning features, in judgments of taste, an act of objective predication occurs in that it is the flower, the landscape, the sunset that we judge to be beautiful. The liking involved thereby fastens on the properties of the thing itself (though not of course of the thing *in* itself) even if those properties cannot account for the judgment we make. In the sublime, however, where the phenomenal trigger is typically characterized by its formlessness, its monstrous boundlessness, or its absolute transcendence of our powers of understanding and sensuous imagination, we are left only with the feeling as such. The sublime defines itself in the process not only as subjective but as self-referential in that it is *about* our feeling and what it portends both in and for the person who feels it. The feeling thus accomplishes its own justification because its true basis is moral rather than cognitive. As in the case of the categorical imperative, it is at once "synthetic" in that it arises a posteriori, on the strength of an actual (and so contingent) empirical experience, and "analytic" (and so a priori) in that the judgment triggered in this way contains its predicates within itself, independent of the contingent event that precipitates it. It thereby yields the holy grail of Kantian thought, the "synthetic a priori": a thing run across in the course of spontaneous natural experience—

something moreover of which we would have no knowledge without such experience—that nonetheless exhibits the character of necessary truth (153-54). And what makes this possible is that, just as in the case of the categorical imperative, the *Bestimmung* or objective determination of the content of the act of judgment doubles as a *Stimmung*, a higher calling that, in revealing the moral vocation at the basis of rational being, determines (*bestimmt*) our response (see especially § 27, "On the Quality of the Liking in Our Judging of the Sublime," 114-17, and the "General Comment on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments," 126-40).

7. This enables us to clarify Kant's claim about the lack of a need for a deduction. If the judgment of the sublime can do without justification, it is not just because it is uniquely self-ratifying; he has already given it in resolving the antinomy of *moral* judgment. The fruit of this resolution is the categorical imperative, of which the sublime turns out to be not simply the empirical expression but what the discussion of beauty as the "symbol of morality" would call the hypotypotic embodiment, granting it the force of direct material manifestation (225-28). The task the *Critique of Practical Reason* sets itself is to show how the natural pursuit of happiness can be squared with the counter-natural call to virtue by showing how the existence of moral causes in the natural world can be squared with the inherently a-moral laws that govern natural phenomena. The result is the natural supernaturalism exhibited in the sublime.[6]

8. But, at another level, the absence of a deduction speaks to a peculiarity of the discourse of the sublime as a whole both in Kant and in those who, for a variety of reasons, challenge his version of the thing. Unlike the feeling of the beautiful, which is always explicitly seen to fall under the net of empirical skepticism, the sublime is invariably naturalized as a token of the ineffable yet inalienable substrate of experience itself. In a specifically Kantian register, we would say that we could not be the creatures we are and not feel (or at any rate not be capable of feeling) the call of the sublime, just as we could not be the creatures we are and not feel the tug of the categorical imperative. This at once reflects and confirms our innate freedom, expressed in our unconditional self-legislating (and so "autonomous") commitment to the "highest good." The objective universality of the sublime thus inheres to our feeling itself, just because it takes root in the conditions of specifically moral feeling that gives feeling per se cognitive weight. The crucial thing, however, is less the fact Kant alleges than the *structure* involved: what Louis Althusser would call the "topology" thanks to which the phenomenon we meet at the surface of experience, as its manifest content, refers back to the underlying depth that determines its latent content conceived as an "absent cause." The key is thus the substrate and the metaphysical perspective it accommodates even when, as already in Kant himself, the writer tries to say otherwise.[7] More precisely, the key is just *metaphysics* and the stubborn afterlife the sublime grants it through the structure of feeling sublimity deploys even for declared enemies of the metaphysical view.

9. To see how this works, we turn to the pedagogical question the editor has set. As Kant concedes, echoing the skeptical Hume ("Of the Standard of Taste") even as he tries to beat him at his own game, the beautiful is subject to interminable because undecidable debate. We do try (we cannot help ourselves) to *educate* taste and, by doing so, to establish some sort of canon or standard that would ratify judgments and so end debate by adjudicating rival claims. Yet even the most cursory review of the empirical (historical, ethnographic) evidence reminds us that, framed in these terms, that is, as a matter of canons, standards, or rules of the sort debate posits, the effort is bound to fail. As Kant himself colorfully puts it, directly paraphrasing Hume's own transposition of a thought in Pope, "although . . . critics can reason more plausibly than cooks, they still share the same fate" (149).[8] No one savors the same thing even though all use the same word for it because the measures employed are necessarily subjective, in constant relativist flux from moment to moment, culture to culture, person to person. Whence, however, Kant's saving *antinomy* of taste and the dodge through the "sensus communis" its resolution at once demands and makes possible (143-62 for the basic ground rules; 210-220 for the antinomy itself, together with its resolution and explanatory comments). Though what sets

our sensuous apparatus humming may be different in every case, the humming is something all of us feel, and take pleasure in, because all of us have a sensuous apparatus, however attuned; and whatever seems to align the faculty of sensuous apprehension with the concepts of the understanding, reconciling pleasure and cognition or, as Kant more soberly puts it, setting "the imagination *in its freedom*" in harmony with "the understanding *in its lawfulness*" (151; Kant's emphasis) produces a sensation we like. It is accordingly in the very nature of aesthetic judgment (and, for all his skepticism, Hume agrees) to suppose some sort of standard, because it supposes what the parallel case of the "judgment of sense" (a liking for the taste of sherry, for example, or a fondness for the color blue) does not: a claim to universal assent, and so to the existence of necessary and objective grounds capable of certifying that claim. The result is, precisely, that we *argue* even though the issue can never be decided one way or the other.[9]

10. By contrast, in the case of the sublime, we *never* argue. Though interpretations of what it portends may differ, the occasioning fact does not; nor does our judgment that something is set stirring that transcends the ordinary limits of purely natural experience. However the sublime is defined, it presents what looks like the radical "face of the Other," breaking in from beyond the narrow horizons of ordinary life.[10] In this sense the discourse of the sublime proves dogmatic in a way its contribution to the critical turn philosophy has taken since Kant would not lead us to expect. Where sublimity is concerned, you either see it or you don't; and if you don't, it is because, like the proverbially phlegmatic Dutch who served as a topical whipping boy at the time, you are either too stupid to perceive it or in a philistine state of denial, stopping your ears to a call you cannot fail to hear without sacrificing your status as a genuine human being.[11] To this extent, unlike the beautiful, the object of a liking of which everyone is conscious, however crude or philistine they may be, a circumstance attested by the fact that there is no person, culture, or period that fails to express it in some way or another, the sublime demands a pedagogy. You have to be *taught* to feel it; or better, you have to be taught that you *already* feel it even if, like Molière's prose-speaking Monsieur Jourdain, you never realized it before.

11. Talk about the sublime thus leads to talk about pedagogy, because there would be no sublime without one. But this points to a further, deeper link between the two themes. If the sublime and pedagogical matters go hand in hand, it is because the sublime is a pedagogy in its own right; and the circular fruit is just the sort of *état d'âme*, the state of soul or feeling, that helps the sublime make sense. The sublime is exactly comparable in this to La Rochefoucauld's conception of "love" as opposed to the appetite for sex for which love serves as an alibi: it is an emotion people would not feel, still less want to or even imagine they *could* feel, if they had not heard others talk about it.[12]

12. The pedagogical office the sublime performs suggests another reason why Kant adduces no deduction, and so another sense in which the sublime is self-ratifying. Any attempt to formulate an antinomy of the sublime would not only be redundant; it would be a pseudo-antinomy because, properly understood, it states no determinate thesis. A claim to feel the sublime thus involves no counter-thesis of the kind a claim that something is beautiful meets. As we have seen, either you feel it or you don't. But if you feel it, and *the moment* you feel it, you know it for what it is, namely, for what it *means*: the moral vocation to which it bears witness. The sublime's inherent moral valence is important, however, less because it underscores how far the feeling itself is the point than because of what this intimates: the sublime is learned, and to that extent not only circular but factitious. More exactly, it is what English-speakers of Hume's generation would have called "specious," a fair, favorable, and above all flattering appearance ("species") whose very appeal to inchoate feeling ought to send up warning flags. [13]

13. The sublime's speciousness illuminates the ambivalence evoked by the text that started it all and that, in starting it, indeed by the mere fact of *making* a start, helps explain at once the intermittence and

contingency the sublime is meant to overcome—features bound up with the fact that while, as even Hume admits, beauty is always with us, the sublime is not. Consider the subtle taint of scandal that surrounds the *Peri hypsous*. For all the authority with which it has been episodically invested, everything about the book is ambiguous, murky, suspect, not least the identity of its author. There is something ill-omened (if also appropriate) in the name we are invited to give in our ongoing uncertainty as to the true one: pseudo-Longinus, creator of what can all too readily come to look like the pseudo-science of a pseudo-object whose sole claim to exist is our subjective conviction of its reality.

14. On the one hand, the *Peri hypsous* pays tribute to, gives an account of, and, at intervals, supplies a model for what the author himself calls "greatness" (*hypsos*). It is already worth noting that, like its look-alike, the Greek *physis* (nature) in Heidegger (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 11-17), this term is subject to the distorting vagaries of interpretive translation. This yields both the Latin *sublimitas* from which our own Romance-inflected word derives and the German *Erhabene* (or "the elevated") and its Hegelian spinoff, *Aufhebung* (usually translated as "sublation," and also meaning "suspension," but with a root meaning of "raising up" or "uplifting"). Though these are, in Latin, English, or German, the only terms by which pseudo-Longinus' Greek can be rendered, their bearing on what the *Peri hypsous* talks about is not as clear as we tend to take for granted. As again later in Boileau, whose chief contemporary exemplars are the dramatic poets Corneille and Racine, pseudo-Longinus' focus is fundamentally literary. If then pseudo-Longinus discusses "greatness" rather than the kind of natural phenomena to which later commentators are drawn from the eighteenth century on, it is because the sublimity in question is precisely the distinctively human kind that great writing manifests. But it is also noteworthy that, as Neil Hertz and Jonathan Lamb have argued with special pertinacity, the context in which pseudo-Longinus teaches us how to master the rhetorical techniques that, in producing literary greatness, grant mastery over the thoughts and feelings of an audience is the specifically *political* realm of public debate. The second point in fact explains the first: what makes literary greatness worth learning is the role it plays in helping us achieve the nakedly political kind.[14]

15. In any event, however Longinian "greatness" is parsed, our attention is drawn to works of literature, or rather to certain moments in those works, where we encounter something "more than merely human"—something as it were radically *unethical* in that it escapes the limits of the *polis* and the constraining *ethos*, the sense at once of right conduct and plausible human character, with which the *polis* is imbued. The feeling of the sublime is thus prompted by the emergence of something unheralded, unconditional, undetermined that in turn testifies to something "more than merely human" in ourselves to the precise extent that we find ourselves responding to it (Longinus 48-49). We meet words that silence ordinary judgment and the natural skepticism this enjoins, and yet that, *in* silencing it, bring us face to face with a dimension whose authority is attested just by the silence to which we are reduced—by the fact that we can only point and wonder, bowing our heads in mute assent.

16. On the other hand, however, the text that draws this picture of the sublime is not itself a work of the kind it cites: it is a sophist manual, a rhetorical how-to book intent less on teaching truth, in the manner of the Platonic adversary whose gospel it ironically enlists in the sophistic cause by quoting examples from it, than on teaching an art capable (among other things) of enabling us to dispense with truth, persuading even against the truth for the sake of a lie—whence the moral paradoxes with which the discourse of the sublime has been fraught from the moment our sophist invented it. Consider, for instance, not only the testimony of the citations from Plato or, placed side by side with these, from Homer, embodiment of the tradition Plato set out to supplant, but that of the *fiat lux* of the Jews: a rhetorical *coup de force* or hammer blow that opens a book whose monolithic claim to universal authority the pagan pseudo-Longinus could not have credited (14). The discourse of the sublime has thus been two-faced from the outset, a faithless profession of faith in rhetoric's power to induce belief in its own invincible powers of make-believe. We meet the same ambiguity in Boileau's revival of the

theory of the sublime, initiating the tradition of which we are ourselves the direct inheritors. In asserting the quasi-divine character of poetic inspiration, Boileau praises a kind of verse utterly unlike the sort of thing he himself tended to write. Is there indeed a poet less sublime than this cynical opportunist whose carefully calibrated satires were designed to make peace with the status quo of which he positioned himself as the slavish servant?[15] Both pseudo-Longinus and Boileau accordingly lend inadvertent credence to a point Edmund Burke is led to make (how consciously or deliberately it is impossible to say) in insisting on linking the sublime not only to the infliction of the kind of pain of which the hated Revolution in France later becomes the best example, but to *obscurity* (*Philosophical Enquiry* 54-59). The sublime is a lurking shadow we cannot quite make out, liable to disappear the moment somebody turns the lights back on.

17. All of this helps us get a handle on the sense of jumping up and down in place with which I began. The sublime is at bottom make-believe. It is not just that, unlike beauty, which is always with us, we have proved entirely capable of doing without it for long periods of time—all the way from the late antiquity of pseudo-Longinus to the classical France of Boileau. It is a confidence trick whose lack of intrinsic substance is indexed by the tortuous lengths to which we have had to go to avoid giving it up. Here we can make a point frequently noted yet never quite digested: the invariably *conditional* character of talk of the sublime. For one thing, underscoring an insight Jacques Derrida develops at Kant's expense, the experience depends on the adoption of a specific point of view (*Vérité en peinture* 44-94). To see a mountain as sublime, you have to stand far away enough to see it whole, yet not so far away that its scale gets lost in the distance: the cherished exhibition of boundlessness depends on setting bounds. Similarly, to see a storm at sea as sublime, you have to stand safely on the shore: seen from a struggling mariner's point of view, it would seem not sublime but merely frightening. For all its apparent immediacy and spontaneity, and the tremendous moral weight it derives therefrom, the sublime needs an enabling frame in the absence of which nothing happens.

18. However, to press harder than Derrida does, the point is not just that the sublime is conditioned by a specific physical standpoint; it depends on (because it is itself entirely mediated by) an act of *contemplation* cut off from any possibility of direct physical involvement. The sublime is not just something you observe from a certain distance; more fundamentally, it is something you look upon and, above all, something you look upon rather than *participate* in. It is in fact an act of contemplation to the *exclusion* of practical engagement—whence the underlying force of Kant's example of the dutiful warrior, or that of the famous photograph of the man facing down a tank in Tiananmen Square. Spectacles like these are and can only be sublime for *us*, as *witnesses*: whatever the protagonists themselves may feel, assuming they feel anything beyond the pure sense of moral compulsion that makes them stand their ground in defiance of the threat of violent death, it is not their own sublimity. [16]

19. But the phenomenon of the sublime is conditional in yet another way: people only start feeling it, or at any rate only start claiming they feel it, in moments of generalized crisis of faith. If, considered in a widescreen historical perspective, sublimity turns out to be strikingly intermittent, it is because it punctuates periods of belief with periods of uneasy unbelief. There is no need for the sublime conceived as a special theme of contemplation, and so as a potential object of theoretical investigation, when people have faith in gods: the place it occupies is already spoken for by feelings of awe and wonder, of Kierkegaardian "fear and trembling," for which the sublime is a substitute. The sublime is the ersatz face of a god who does not exist, an idolatry in search of an idol in times of loss of faith. Kant's awareness of this fact leads him to temper the hypotypotic effect noted earlier by reminding us that the "cognition of God" the sublime seems to promise "is merely symbolic" (22), a product of anthropomorphic analogy that says nothing about God's nature or even existence. Kant's commitment to the doctrine of sublimity's powers of witness needs therefore to be set beside the suspicion voiced when he remarks that "[p]erhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth" (135). An interest in the sublime is attended by the constant risk of idolatrous hypostasis, not only turning empty words into lofty substances but substituting pseudo-entities like these for the kind of lowly quotidian things about which useful talk is actually possible.

20. All of which explains what seems so unseemly (not to say creepy) in the recent vogue for talk of God, religion, and faith in writers like Gianni Vattimo (*Belief*), Slavoj Å½iÅ¾ek (*On Belief* and *The Puppet and the Dwarf*), and Giorgio Agamben (*Time That Remains*), cultural critics who have made a name for themselves not only by talking of the sublime, but by exposing the superstitious delusions and bad faith that infest other people's talk. It is not just that you cannot have it both ways, performing a rigorously secular critique one day and then turning to apologetics the next. The fact of starting with the one makes the other impersonally abstract in a way that defeats the whole point of belief and the moral claim it makes; and it does so precisely by projecting all of these things into the dimension of the sublime. A similar tendency to leap into the sublime as into a kind of abyss also troubles me in a writer whose commitment to the divine is by contrast explicit from the start, Emmanuel Lévinas. In locating the source of our at once moral and spiritual responsibility in an uppercase Other first authentically encountered beyond the far horizon of perceptible Being, Lévinas suppresses what makes responsibility matter: the thick and complex moral grain of everyday life. And what indeed can our essential responsibility to God, the good, and, most especially, to other people mean if we only genuinely experience it on some sort of transcendental rebound, divorced from the admittedly humdrum and all too easily routinized "givenness" of those the Golden Rule nonetheless chooses to call, not *an* other, still less *the* Other, but simply *others*, and even neighbors?[17]

21. To be sure, the history of the sublime, especially since Kant first gave it a systematic because conscientiously critical form, is the history of the attacks to which it has been exposed from a variety of quarters, including at times some of the writers just mentioned. Already, in Hegel, what Kant describes as the sublime is re-described as the displaced expression of the historical process Kantian idealism sets out to circumvent. True, as Hegel conceives it, history assumes an idealist cast of its own. What makes events happen, giving them the momentum of irreversible change, turns out to be the work of conscious self-actualization by which absolute Mind or Spirit takes up the task of bringing history to an end (in the sense of terminus) by granting it an end (as final cause). Still, it remains Spirit's dialectical destiny as well as transcendental mission to move toward self-actualizing consciousness through its transactions with the external world it negates and the historical evolution negation sets in train. Hegel's idealist historicization of the Kantian scheme accordingly opens the door for the Marxist critique of the "aesthetic ideology" of which Kant and Hegel alike are iconic representatives.[18] In asserting history's priority over our self-defeating efforts to comprehend it, Hegel teaches Marx to rewrite his work as the mystified reflex of the purely material forces that drive history from below and of the emergent world-consciousness (the truth is the whole indeed) by which the bourgeois individual is conditioned, transcended, and dissolved as a mere historical phase.[19] The Marxist critique in turn helps provoke its counter in Nietzsche's Will-to-Power and the ironical "genealogies" for which it supplies the Dionysiac engine: sardonic just-so stories that cut the ground out from beneath both the self-deceiving high-mindedness that Kant and Hegel embody and the ignoble *ressentiment*, the whining rancorous resentment that is its deformed nihilistic (for which Nietzsche also reads Marxist) twin.

22. Or take Freud's most distinctive contribution to aesthetics, the "uncanny." Inspired in part by the as it were transcendental mode of skepticism with which Nietzsche replaces the less presumptuous because prudently experimental kind that Kant inherited from Hume, Freud invents an ironic just-so story of his own: the Œdipal "family romance" that distils the neo-tragic plot of so much nineteenth-century fiction and drama (Brooks). Like the sublime, of which it is besides a close historical cousin as well as empirical look-alike, the uncanny is the figure of both repression and return—of the violent disjunctions repression at once denies (as "sublimation") and reproduces in the form of legible

symptoms of which the repetition compulsion and the death drive are characteristic types. As Å½iÅ¾ek pointed out some time ago, the sublime itself thereby returns as wearing the face of the unconscious as such, made real in exactly the same way as Kant's categorical imperative (*Sublime Opbject*; also see Hertz). And so it has continued ever since: in the radical "unconcealment" of Heideggerian Being; in the Lacanian Gaze and the traumatic induction into the realm of the Symbolic its emergence signals; in Derridean "iteration" with its simultaneously Freudian and Heideggerian vocation for death;[20] in François Lyotard's dislocating confrontation with the "post-modern condition," demolishing the "master narratives" imposed on the feral sprawl of intractable change; or in Paul de Man's generalization of the "permanent parabasis" inscribed in Hegel's bête noire, the "so-called Romantic irony," and the perpetual "fall" into inauthentic "intersubjectivity" that Romantic irony triggers ("Rhetoric of Temporality").

23. Yet a feature of such attacks is that they are invariably conducted from the standpoint of the topology Althusser fingers. The fruit of the successive critiques to which the sublime has been exposed is less to break its spell than to rename its principle, with the shifting moral and affective valences the renaming entails. The history of the sublime is a history of sublimation and return on the model, precisely, of the return of the repressed or of Heideggerian unconcealment. The sublime is accordingly what *comes back*, a ghostly *revenant* whose spectral persistence negates the historical time of intermittence, chance, and change even when it claims history as its source. It belongs to the family of phenomena of which it is so often asserted that they are "always already there," pinpointing in turn what, to paraphrase Hegel, we should call the *cunning* of the sublime: it recreates itself in such a way as to haunt the thoughts of skeptics as readily as those of true believers. To say that the sublime is nothing but repression and repetition, Being and its unconcealment, ideology and the traumas of the unconscious, writing and the mortal iterations of "the trace," or, going all the way back to the *Peri hypsous*, rhetoric and the undecidable play of tropic difference, winds up reinstating the metaphysical authority it appears to subvert. The tug, the call, remains, even in the state of ruin that has been a privileged site of the sublime almost from the first.

24. The reader will expect at this point a marshaling of probative examples taken from the primary corpus of making rather than that of theoretical commentary. Many such come to mind, and most poignantly perhaps that of the incidence of the sublime in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—a text I regularly teach in the context of murder-mystery plots that are themselves signal hothouses of sublimity. It is remarkable to note that the sublime is systematically associated in Shelley's novel with the strategy of avoidance and denial by which Victor Frankenstein turns his eyes away both from the moral claim his unhappy Creature makes on him and from the vengeful task the Creature winds up performing as the agent of Victor's own unconscious wishes. Whenever Victor communes with natural sublimity, the Creature does something terrible offstage, the clearest instance coming in the episode in which Victor chooses to spend his wedding night out under the stars in a boat on the lake while the Creature strangles his bride, Elizabeth—the point being less that, anticipating Freud, the sublime arises here as a figure of the unconscious than what the theory of the unconscious suppresses: the moral authority of lowly *ethos*, of mere commonplace humanity, and the concomitant demand for simple justice that Victor refuses to honor.[21] However, for the sake of economy, I will focus on just one example, the lesson taught by what I do not hesitate to call the most sublime thing Walter Benjamin ever wrote, the parable of the chess-playing automaton that opens the "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a counter-move. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this

> device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight. (253)[22]

At one level, the parable can be read as a private allegory avenging a personal insult. It is in the cryptic nature of the historical project made known to him in the original version of Benjamin's "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" that it should have provoked the notorious impatience voiced in Theodor Adorno's letter of 10 November 1938, explaining its rejection by the Institute for Social Research to which Benjamin had submitted it for publication. Though Adorno found the essay suggestive, he deplored the lack of the kind of encompassing theoretical framework needed to give its content the "concretion" and intelligibility dialectical historiography demands. Offering not an argument but a series of mosaic fragments loosely arranged in symbolically charged "constellations" of historical odds and ends and textual citations, Benjamin's essay struck Adorno as woefully "abstract" precisely because the fragments of which it was composed were cut off from the mediating socio-historical matrix that conditions what they are, how they came to be, and so what they mean. Shrewdly linking the text's theoretical underdevelopment to his correspondent's crypto-Kabbalistic sensibility, Adorno writes,

> The theological motif of calling things by their names tends to turn into a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts. If one wished to put it harshly, one would say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched. Only theory could break the spell—your own resolute, whole-somely speculative theory. (Benjamin, *Aesthetics* 129-130, with minor changes)

In response to these complaints, the "Theses" will now provide the theory Adorno wants. The point of departure, however, is not a preliminary statement of the theory itself, but just the sort of lapidary fragment Adorno mistrusts. All we get is the story of the device and the swindle it turned out to be.

25. But of course what gives the fragment its angry thrust, thereby not only avenging Benjamin's wounded pride but also foreshadowing, if not the theory, then the space the essay will map out for it and the mode of writing it will defend, is the portrait of "historical materialism" with which the fable ends. The parable's automaton is a Critical Theorist and, just like its model in Marxist thought, it is designed to prove not only that it wins, but that it wins *because it is an automaton*. Victory is assured by the apparent elimination of the human player, the living subject of historical experience. Victory is thus presented as a mindless reflex of the deterministic necessity that historical materialism appoints. But if the automaton wins, the real reason is that it cheats: victory is achieved by the all-too-human agency of the ignoble hunchback concealed inside. The parable calls the hunchback "theology." To this extent it echoes the classic denunciation of Marxist scientism that, notably in Adorno himself, Critical Theory also endorses. If historical materialism passes for the infallible science of history its exponents claim the dialectic makes it, it is because it masks the metaphysics sustaining the sublimely trans-historical posture that the supporting notion of science presumes. True, at the tip of Benjamin's pen, theology is by no means an unequivocally pejorative term; one of its functions here is in fact to announce the messianic Angel that emerges later in the essay (257-58). If theology nevertheless remains a "wizened" figure obliged to hide its shameful misshapenness, it is because, browbeaten by a materialist outlook he takes to be unanswerable, Benjamin fails to keep the faith materialism itself unconsciously espouses.

26. Yet in calling the hunchback "theology" and sneering at his grotesquely wizened shape, Benjamin disfigures his own underlying insight. It is after all possible to see Benjamin's hunchback less as personified Theory than as the mere lowercase person whose form theory usurps. More precisely, he is the protagonist of what Benjamin elsewhere ("The Storyteller") mourns as the specifically human mode of experience lost with the demotic art of storytelling that the modern world of commodity

capitalism and mechanized warfare has destroyed.[23] Seen in this light, the hunchback is the guileful *little guy*, the child, apprentice, peasant, or humble artisan whose survival traditional storytelling helped secure by teaching the art of crafty prevarication in the face of overwhelming force. In turning the parable into an allegorical exposure of the dialectical wizard concealed behind the curtain of charlatanry, Benjamin misses the story's Oz-like potential. As Dorothy learns, "There's no place like home," not because the solution to political injustice is to kiss the rod of the status quo, but because, the promise of flight over the rainbow of the socialist utopia notwithstanding, there's no place *other* than home. It all comes back to experience, but to experience conceived less as a shameful limit or a lifeless puppet dancing on hidden strings than as the resource we share with our neighbors in the vernacular here and now.[24]

27. As everything in the history of the world since Kant impresses on us, there are big things out there—forces it is hard to resist and horrors we need to confess if also hopes we would be sorry to relinquish. But the thing about big things is that they are in the end just that: things as available to experience and as inherently amenable to manipulation as any other. Which is why, if there is a hero to the story this essay tells, it is David Hume. It is a remarkable fact, but a fact nonetheless, that of all the great contributors to the birth of the modern aesthetic way in the Enlightenment, Hume is the only one who had nothing to say about the sublime. True, he does use the *word* from time to time, as when, in speaking in "Of the Standard of Taste" of the "intemperate zeal for particular modes of worship" exhibited by the religious dramas of classical France, he calls the murderously fanatical high priest Joad of Racine's *Athalie* "sublime" with a mordant irony that needs no scare quotes to make itself felt (248). It is also true that, in the posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, something like the sublime creeps in from time to time in Demea and Cleanthes's efforts to prove the existence of God "from design" on the strength of the spectacular might and order of the natural universe. And the energetic freedom with which Philo generates skeptical arguments and conceits in defense of open-ended experimental worldliness approaches a positively Shaftesburian pitch of enthuasiasm—only think of the "great vegetable" (87), the self-engendering cosmic mushroom, which he proposes to counter insistence on design. Yet the sublime as such and by name is conspicuous by its absence from any philosophical utterance Hume can be said to have made in his own person.

28. The reason for this absence will by now be obvious. If we are taught anything by the "experimental method" Hume designed to unravel the Laocoön-like serpentine knots in which he found philosophy entangled, it is that philosophy goes astray the moment it turns to metaphysics. If then he had nothing to say about the sublime, it is because the sublime just *is* metaphysics and so the enemy of experience and the sense of demotic humanity experience affords: it is not for nothing that the only critical authority "Of the Standard of Taste" he cites by name is Sancho Panza. The price for this concession may well be abandonment of the peculiar messianic promise the sublime contrives to keep alive. But if the alternative is the surrender of humanity the sublime demands in exchange, the price is perhaps worth paying.

29. And yet can we dispense with the sublime so easily, and is dispensing with it quite the moral Hume's silence draws? On 7 July 1776, the pious James Boswell visited the notoriously atheistical Scottish sage to see what character he would sustain on his death bed (*Extremes* 11-15). To Boswell's dismay and even fright, causing nightmares that haunted him for months afterwards, his host appeared to accept the prospect of imminent "annihilation" with perfect equanimity. Boswell was clearly struck by what he saw as *terrible* in the spectacle—so terrible as to shake his faith in the consolations of orthodox religion. But he was just as struck by something *sublime* in the scene even if he was as unwilling to confess it as Hume was averse to making a fuss. Boswell's subsequent account of the visit accordingly provides a fitting pendant to Adam Smith's memorial of Hume's death in a public letter to the publisher William Strahan, not only preempting pious rumors of a death-bed conversion but underscoring precisely the *sublimity* of the serene good humor with which his friend embraced

approaching dissolution (Hume, *Essays* xliii-xlix).

30. We meet here with the intimation of a kind of immortality grounded in Hume's cheerful consciousness of how absolute mortality is. As Smith tells it, the story offers the portrait (more properly, the death mask or effigy) of a purely rational mind all the more nobly deserving of a certain afterlife in memory for holding fast to its sense of reality to the end. Still, to grasp what is genuinely sublime here demands calculating the potential for irony. It is entirely possible, for instance, that Hume was playacting: Dr. Johnson certainly insisted that he was when Boswell recounted the scene to him (*Extremes* 155). It is then only on the assumption that Hume was sincere, dying as cheerfully as Smith claims he did, that we find something to admire, something that *moves* us and that, in doing so, leaves us in the state of open-ended reflection Kant identifies with the aesthetic in each of its great modes.

31. But we need to note a second point on which irony may fasten here: the sublimity Smith conveys trades on the hypotypotic exhibition of the topology Althusser describes. Smith's picture of the dying Hume is the moral expression of the "invisible hand" of the marketplace, a force whose mysterious benevolence is a match for that of the orthodox God Boswell was so anxious to see Hume acknowledge. The version of the sublime in evidence in this episode is accordingly tied to the emergent capitalist ideology whose protagonist is the liberal individual. The clear-eyed candor with which Hume faced death becomes the exemplary proxy for Smith's vision of political economy just insofar as it takes a mind like this to comprehend a free market's operations as the absent cause of the "wealth of nations." Smith thus slips unawares into the imaginary as readily as Boswell does. We would all like to think that we could die in the way Hume did, and so be worthy of remembrance after death, especially if, like Hume, *in* dying this way, we turn out to stand on what Smith shows to be the winning side of history. In imagining our end, we cross a limit that cannot be crossed, activating in the process the structure that, following Freud, Lacan calls life in the future perfect: life lived in the light (or shadow) of the ideal identity I *will* finally have achieved once I reveal myself to be the person I like to imagine I am ("Zeitlich-Entwicklungsgeschichte," esp. 180-182).

32. It occurs to me, however, that the potential for irony is part of the package, integral to the *balance* Hume at least appears to have struck. What is sublime in the spectacle of the dying sage is the effort to accommodate irony without making a de Manian meal of it. Such is the substance of a remark Jane Austen's Mr. Bennett makes. Presented in a letter from Mr. Collins with what Lizzie's father takes to be the fantastical news of his daughter's engagement to Mr. D'Arcy, he rhetorically asks: "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours, and to laugh at them in turn?" (272). But it is likewise the substance of what most interested Kierkegaard: the perspective of life *after* the famous leap of faith—the life whose absurd ordinariness and contingency inspire, far more than faith itself, the fear and trembling we feel on the brink. Kierkegaard's is after all a *Socratic* Christ whose gift is the down-to-earth taste for irony he shares with someone like Hume. Seen against this background, the model we should imitate is not that of the Knight of the Infinite whose heroically self-dramatizing excesses *The Concept of Irony* mocks in the philosophical person of Hegel, but rather that of the Knight of Faith. Though Kierkegaard goes on to discuss the story of the binding of Isaac as his key example, his energetic insistence on denying Abraham's sacrifice any tragic or noble overtones reminds us that, when he first appears, the Knight of Faith is a *nobody*. Kierkegaard portrays him in fact as looking like nothing so much as some petty state functionary, "a pen-pusher who has lost his soul to Italian bookkeeping." His normal manner, moreover, shows him to belong "entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more"; and as he makes his way back from a Sunday outing to church, it pleases him to imagine "that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home—for example, roast lamb's head with vegetables" (*Fear and Trembling* 38-41), even though his penurious circumstances make such a feast unlikely.

33. It is not enough, in short, to avoid the sub-human level of the kind of phlegmatic insensibility for which

the world has no outside, no transcendent other capable of redeeming our fallenness. We must also avoid the in-human extravagance to which, from post-Kantian Romanticism down to the post-modern present, our longing for something more has exposed us. Like the Knight of Faith, or the Humean sage, we achieve such greatness as we are capable of only so long as we remain "solid all the way through," avoiding the kind of flight into the imaginary that is the Knight of the Absolute's stock in trade. It is surely the case that there is no one way to do this: Kierkegaard's faith is as subject to ironic second thoughts as Hume's steady faithlessness; nor do the moral, social, or historical contexts in which the call to sublimity makes itself intermittently heard stand still, providing a fixed horizon of the sort the sublime consistently promises. But then, as Kierkegaard describes it, the leap of faith is not, as Kant's example encourages us to picture it, a leap into the void or an abyss. It is a *dance step* the whole art of which consists of coming gracefully back to earth.

Notes

1 K. G. Hamilton, "Structure of Milton's Prose," as cited, with a diagnostic commentary, in Fish 168. As readers of Fish's book will note, I endorse his diagnosis.

2 On the beautiful, see below. On truth, see Williams 163: "Everybody everywhere has a concept of truth; indeed, they all have the same concept of truth. (The fact that they may have very different theories of truth just shows how much people's theories of truth misrepresent their grasp of the concept.)" The most eloquent point in the passage is of course the resort to a parenthesis for the key idea.

3 My colleague Christopher Kopff at the University of Colorado has informed me that, though the author of *Peri hypsous* is surely not the phantom "Dionysius Longinus," a name universally regarded as the product of a Byzantine scribal error, there do seem to be good grounds for thinking he is the third-century sophist Cassius Longinus. For the case in the latter's favor, see Heath. However, though anticipating Heath in attributing the *Peri hypsous* to Cassius Longinus, the author of the translation I have used notes that the one surviving contemporary list of Cassius Longinus' works does not mention our text: see Longinus, xvii. As Heath himself acknowledges, moreover, short of the discovery of a papyrus fragment with Cassius Longinus' name on it, the attribution remains a matter of informed guesswork. We are accordingly left in the odd if interesting position of owing a major current in the history of ideas to an orphan. I will pay tribute to this oddity by conforming to skeptical usage in calling our author "pseudo-Longinus."

4 The sublime's role as a structural condition of the possibility of modern (post-Enlightenment) history is forecast in Kant's pre-critical *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. In section 2, "Of the Attributes of the Beautiful and Sublime in Man in General," 51-75, a universal taxonomic table of human character types keyed to the traditional humors (the sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholic) transparently trades on an external standpoint available only to the melancholic, whose distinctive aesthetic characteristic is the sublime. After a discussion of the "beautiful and sublime in the interrelations of the two sexes," this is then followed, in section 4, by the extension of humoral characteristics to the nations of the world. Only the melancholy have access both to the whole of human nature and, as a consequence, to the full span of human history because they alone have access to the totalizing standpoint sublimity affords. This in turn enables us to modify White's classic picture of the rhetorical foundations of modern historiography. The precondition of the various modes of "emplotment" different historians bring to the business of writing history is not simply the place occupied in the mythico-tropological scheme of possibilities (e.g., the comic and synedochic for Hegel or the tragic and metaphorical for Nietzsche) but, behind and beneath all of these, the posture of sublimity that gives emplotment a grip.

5 The central problem of limits (the problem itself and the fact that it is central) emerges in the preface to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, 3: "Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find

both sides of the limit thinkable (i.e. we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought)." That this traffic with the limits of thought and expression is essentially traffic with the sublime, already obvious on its face, and emphasized by the very possibility of the amazingly hubristic first sentence of the main body of the text ("The world is all that is the case"), becomes still more so by the laconically pyrotechnical close of the *Tractatus*: "*Wovon mann nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß mann schweigen*" ("Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"). For a comparable sublimization of philosophy keyed to limits, see Derrida's defense of the Cartesian *cogito* against the historical reduction to which it is exposed by Foucault, "Cogito et histoire de la folie." Foucault's critique of Cartesian reason in the light of rational terror in the face of madness is refuted by aligning the merely *historical* form Descartes gives reason in his capacity as a being *in* history with the form of "reason in general," which not only aims to exceed all limits, including those history imposes, but, in its vocation as a mode of radical "excess," turns out to be a form of madness in its own right.

6 See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 117-24. I borrow the phrase from Abrams, who borrows it from Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.

7 Escaping the self-defeating dogmatisms of metaphysics is in fact the point of departure for the entire critical enterprise, staked out in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 7-15. Kant's evocation of the "endless controversies" that bedevil metaphysics echoes the picture drawn in the introduction to the book that woke him from his dogmatic slumber, Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*:

> Nor is there requir'd such profound knowledge to discover the present imperfect condition of the sciences, but even the rabble without doors may judge from the noise and clamour, which they hear, that all goes not well within. There is nothing which is not the subject of debate, and in which men of learning are not of contrary opinions. The most trivial question escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision. Disputes are multiplied, as if every thing was uncertain; and these disputes are managed with the greatest warmth, as if every thing was certain. Amidst all this bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gained by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army. (41-42)

The fact that Hume's serio-comic portrait of the "present imperfect condition of the sciences," especially in its emphasis on the "proselytes" rhetoric secures for even "the most extravagant hypothesis," can apply so readily to the recent and contemporary discourse of the sublime speaks to the deeper issues I am trying to broach.

8 For Kant's source, Hume, "The Sceptic," 163; for Hume's, Pope, "Essay on Criticism," lines 9-10: "'Tis with our *Judgments* as our *Watches*, none / Go just *alike*, yet each believes his own."

9 For a demonstration of this point, see my review of Marshall, esp. 187-89.

10 The phrase is Lévinas's. For characteristic analyses of our relation to the Other (the capital is symptomatic), see *Totalité et infini* [*Time and Infinity*] and *Le Temps et l'Autre* [*Time and the Other*]. The phrase is not specifically designed for the sublime, but rather for our relation to God and other people (*autrui*). Still, that Lévinas's conception of the Other is a cognate of the sublime will become apparent shortly, as will its vulnerability to the polemic I develop later with reference to the modern tradition of sublimity as a whole.

11 On contemporary treatments of the Dutch, see Schama, 257-88. See too Kant's remarks in the *Observations*: "A Dutchman is of an orderly and diligent disposition and, as he looks solely to the useful, he

has little feeling for what in the finer understanding is beautiful and sublime. A great man signifies exactly the same to him as a rich man, by a friend he means a correspondent, and a visit that makes him no profit is very boring to him. He contrasts as much with a Frenchman as with an Englishman, and in a way he is a German become very phlegmatic" (105).

12 La Rochefoucauld, maxime 136: "There are people who would never have been in love if they had no heard other people talk about love." (75) All translations from French are my own.

13 The ambiguity informs historical use of the word "specious" itself, whose modern sense takes time separating itself from the prior meaning of having a "persuasive," "favorable," or "attractive" (but not necessarily false or misleading) appearance. Gibbon, e.g., invariably uses it in the latter sense—though, in keeping with his ironic view of human conduct, the very fact of offering a favorable or flattering appearance invites skepticism. In a typical example, discussing what he regards as the nefarious collusion of the emperor Constantine and the early Christian Church, Gibbon speaks of the churchly allegorization of the Sybilline verses in Virgil's fourth eclogue as "sublime predictions" of the Christian revelation: "if a more splendid, and indeed specious, interpretation of the fourth ecologue contributed to the conversion of the first Christian emperor, Virgil may deserve to be ranked among the most successful missionaries of the Gospel" (*The Decline and Fall*, 1.297).

14 On the specifically political problem of "mastery" (and so of "greatness") *Peri hypsous* raises, see Hertz, chap. 1, "A Reading of Longinus," and Lamb. For a comparable reading of ancient stoicism in the mode of Senecan sublimity, see Braden. Chap. 1 argues that, especially in its Senecan version, stoicism pursues, in the mode of wisdom, the project of world domination the emperor (and again later, the absolutist monarch) forecloses in the political sphere. The Sage accordingly constitutes a rival to, and so double for, his egomaniacal overlord—whence the decompensating anger that drives Senecan tragedy, expressing the universal will-to-power thwarted by the imperial status quo. Thus, in its very sublimity, Senecan stoicism exhibits the commingled ambition and resentment Nietzsche as well as Freud would lead us to suspect.

15 Most of Boileau's output consists of verse satires and epistles whose horizons are almost entirely bound by literary feuds and friendships with contemporaries. Meanwhile, Boileau's career reached its apogee with his appointment as *historiographe du Roi* in 1677. As such, his functions were those of a court propagandist trading in the *false* sublime of unstinting praise of his absolutist patron. The one great exception is the late Satire XII, "Sur l'équivoque," on figures of equivocation, and for a start puns, which mounts a last-ditch defense of the classical cultural order he had served so punctiliously (if wittily) throughout his career against the triumphant "moderns" who were in the process of relegating it to irrelevancy. Though beginning as an attack on off-color punning of the sort fashionable (and already satirized) in his youth, "Sur l'équivoque" winds up presenting a history of humanity since the Fall whose theme is the invincibly equivocal nature of language itself, and so of all human judgment, forever condemned to succumb to diabolical misstatement, misrepresentation, and misconstruction. The result is something approaching the sublime, comparable in this to the climax of Pope's *Dunciad* or the satirical Jean de La Bruyère's turn in "Des esprits forts" ("Of Freethinkers, or Wits"), the final section of *Les Caractères*, to a Pascalian picture of humanity's miserable littleness in the awe-inspiring perspective of God's universe.

16 The disjunction of seeing and doing that the sublime enjoins finds an echo in Marshall's analysis of Fanny Price's quandary in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where the cult of "real feeling" associated with a taste for the sublime risks leaving Austen's heroine powerless to act for the sake of true love (chap. 3). But also note La Rochefoucauld's maxim 216: "Perfect valor would be to do without witnesses what one would be capable of doing before everbody." In challenging a sharp distinction between seeing and doing, this admonition undermines our Kantian examples in two ways: by reminding us that what strikes us as sublime is quite possibly an artifact of our presence as witnesses, inspiring what we wrongly perceive as self-forgetful sacrifice; and by reminding us of the Lacanian Gaze under which all of us live in our own eyes, such that we

are always playing to some sort of crowd. Consider in this light another of Kant's examples of the sublime, a poem by Frederick the Great in which that monarch accustoms himself to the thought of his mortality by reimagining it as his last gift to his people:

> Oui, finissons sans trouble, et mourons sans regrets,
> En laissant l'Univers comblé de nos bienfaits.
> Ainsi l'Astre du jour, au bout de sa carrière,
> Répand sur l'horizon une douce lumière,
> Et les derniers rayons qu'il darde dans les airs
> Sont ses derniers soupirs qu'il donne à l'Univers.
>
> ("Yes, let us end untroubled, and die without regrets,
> Leaving the World brim-full with our benefactions.
> Thus the Star of day, come to the end of its career,
> Pours out its sweet light across the horizon,
> And the last rays that it shotots through the air
> Are its last sighs, its parting gifts to the World.") (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 184)

The problem of course is that, once we know that Frederick himself wrote these lines, it is hard to shut our ears to the plangent undertone of sentimental self-pity. What the loyal Kant sees as sublime, no doubt in part because he drew parallels between the great king's labors for his subjects and his own heroic exertions on behalf of philosophical truth, turns out to look rather more like kitsch.

17 I am reminded here, by contrast, of the closing words of Sartre's autobiographical *Les mots* (*Words*). Sartre tells us that he was the son of an Alsatian Protestant who, having rejected his own father's desire to make him a pastor, nevertheless "kept all his life the taste for the sublime and devoted his zeal to manufacturing pompous circumstances out of small events" (3-4). He accordingly did the next best thing and became a teacher of German. Loyal to his father at least in this, Sartre himself developed a taste for the sublime in the form of the "impossible Redemption" from the *passion inutile* (the useless passion) of mere unjustified existence, a pursuit that made a writer of him. Approaching now the end of his life, Sartre feels that he has at last shaken off the search for Calvinist Justification inherited from his ancestors: "atheism is a cruel enterprise that demands great stamina: I believe I have conducted it right to the end" (210-11). The question is, now that he has done it, what is left? "If I store the impossible Redemption back in the prop room, what remains? A man, made by all other men, and who is worth any of them, and whom anyone is worth" (213).

18 For a classic study, the more noteworthy for extending to Marx the neo-Marxist critique he first unleashes on Kant, see Eagleton. Also see Kauffman. I share Kauffman's interest in acknowledging how, for all his shortcomings, Kant got things right in a way subsequent criticism of his work makes hard to understand.

19 The sublime shapes *Das Kapital* throughout: why else open the book with the *commodity*, an alienated fetish that fixes our fascinated eyes on its status as a synecdochic token of the immense system of relations of production, exchange, class, and force that, in engendering it, leaves this transcendental clue to its own operations and the false consciousness to which it exposes us? In the *Communist Manifesto*, meanwhile, the "critical-utopian" perspective with which the text closes opens on the entire world as well as the future, projecting us to the kind of limits of conception, imagination, and understanding Kant associates with the sublime. Eagleton, chap. 8, "The Marxist Sublime," and Kaufman tease out the ironies involved.

20 I am thinking especially here of Derrida's deeply misguided (and conspicuously metaphysical) critique of Austin, "signature événement contexte."

21 I am indebted for this angle on Shelley's novel to J. Jennifer Jones's account of the Creature's efforts to make his creator "hear [his] tale" and so acknowledge his existence and rights.

22 For the true story behind Benjamin's fable, see Standage. The historical machine, assembled by the Austrian civil servant Wolfgang von Kempelen, differs in important ways from Benjamin's description. For one thing, there was no illusion of transparency, simply an effort to make the inside of the machine look empty, concealing the compartment in which Kempelen's confederate hid. More significantly, there was no hunchback of the kind Benjamin imagines: the players Kempelen and his successors used were perfectly ordinary in every respect save for their mastery of chess. The hunchback is thus entirely Benjamin's invention and should be interpreted in that light.

23 See too Agamben's book-length commentary-cum-extrapolation, *Infancy and History*.

24 As attested in particular by the homely personal anecdotes lacing its epilogue in the form of an appendix on "Ideology Today," the subject with which he first broke into print, Å½iÅ¾ek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf* tries to get to something like the position embraced here by expounding what he calls the "perversely" materialist "core" of Christianity. However, as the fact that his own Lacanian version of critical materialism obliges him to regard this as somehow, precisely, *perverse* already suggests, the best he can manage is to make what he had obviously hoped would be the more down-to-earth vision of religion and materialism alike look as messianically high-strung and abstract as everything he writes against.

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The Sublime and Education

The Sublime: History of an Education

Paul Hamilton, Queen Mary, University of London

Introduction

1. The sublime, taken as an aesthetic category originating in Kant's third Kritik, but by no means terminating there, has been read in strikingly symptomatic ways by late twentieth-century theory. To review these different interpretations or uses of its antinomial structure is to appreciate the sublime's continuing life in the ways in which we think the integrity, limitations and motivations of our contemporary intellectual procedures. I want both to show the varieties of this ongoing education, and then to ask questions about the place of the originally aesthetic function of the sublime which these utilitarian expansions of it seem to entail.[1]

2. Arguably, for my purposes, at least five main versions of the sublime have lately put themselves forward. In each case, a normal, expected economy of experience is exceeded. In sublimity we appear to be getting something for nothing, or to be re-writing loss as recovery, failure as success. This fantasy or phantasmal structure can take several forms. First of all, remembering that the transgressions of the sublime were described by Kant through a conflict of the faculties, we can look for the obvious re-statement of his psychology in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis of the sublime both addresses a scene which confirms classic oedipal patterns and confronts an aesthetic suspension of the acceptance of these patterns otherwise necessary to a psychoanalytically-viable personality. Secondly, deconstructive criticism following the psychoanalytic venture in the United States (Weiskel to de Man) accepts the sublime as an exemplary catachresis: a misnomer in which the irresolvability of constative and performative utterance is mistaken as a present experience rather than just the *difference* between the two. This scepticism, though, leads to the materialism sketched in de Man's late work in which the sublime's characteristic advance beyond conceptualism is criticised as a deceitful medium, an attempt to pass off what must remain phenomenal as having a higher, noumenal authority; an attempt to suggest a progressive future through what must always remain a memorial to the recurrent linguistic structure of our thought. This move characterizes ideology for de Man. But the different development of this crux in Kant's thought by his immediate successors, from Fichte to Hegel, helps us see here that de Man arrests an ongoing impulse whose educative process might well continue.

3. Political readings of the sublime similarly spend beyond their means. Those following Hannah Arendt concentrate on the common sense precipitated by our otherwise ungrounded notions of what is to count as aesthetic experience and what is not. Culture rather than gumption is what is at stake. Negotiation here tends to displace the particular aesthetic judgement on which agreement was originally sought; more important becomes a sense of the common basis discovered in the act of negotiation or judgment itself. Even if we disagree, our differences must be subtended or underwritten by the agreed premises which make the subsequent disparity visible. Schelling's ontology was the immediate post-Kantian idiom in which this problem was discussed. Fourthly, though, many more historical corroborations loom. It has always proved an intriguing problem to distinguish discourse about the sublime from those which it produces. The turn of sublimity from whatever it was supposed to be into anything that describes it fuels readings of it, from Longinus to Peter de Bolla, as a transformational rhetoric. Then the interpreter's sense of borrowing against the security of description she was supposedly establishing is at its most palpable. The national debt, which generalized and historically legitimated this kind of economic practice, evolved contemporaneously with renewed interest in theorizing the sublime.

4. More recently, though, political readers of the sublime (Maurice Blanchot, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean-Luc Nancy and their critics) have, like the post-Kantians, returned to the logic of the sublime rather than its historical pervasiveness to recover its political character. Its suspension of concepts in the service of negotiating a common sense that, existing in dissent as much as in unanimity, can never be accomplished, became a way of honouring the sovereignty of the subject without lapsing into old-fashioned individualism. In other words, outside Arendt's sphere of political negotiation altogether, the sublime individual — she of the constitutionally conflicted or irreconcilable faculties — defies assimilation in an exemplary way. There is nothing exceptional in such idiosyncrasy; it models the conflicted idiom of our ethnically, religiously, and even secularly mixed societies. Or, put another way, we are all exceptional. In a multi-cultural world, the inoperative or unavowed (*inavouable*) community is evoked by the subject for whom that community's actual enforcement would be regimentation and tyranny. Yet such a subject herself sets a pattern to which we might belong, for what we might become in a fantasy of our completion, for a way of being human. The fact that we do not, impossibly, actually become all these differences, sets the agenda for a politics directed at an unavowed or inoperative target different from Arendt's community of judgement. This sublime politics keeps fiction or aesthetics politically relevant in a different way from the way Arendt describes.

5. In Kant's original exposition of the sublime, these individual exceptions to an overall economy were justified not as a condition to be psychoanalysed into the normal and its discontents; nor as a general linguistic condition beset by catachresis; nor as evidencing the flexibility of consensus; nor as revealing an historical permeability of community and individual finally allowing the latter to put the former in suspension. They were justified as *aesthetic*, that is, as definitively generative of a feeling of pleasure in how we managed to have the experience we did. There is something curiously undifferentiated in this aesthetic sense of our own life — and Rousseau revelled in it — an abstract expressionism that tends to complicate the representation of any discursive society to which we then want to belong or of which we want to be a unit. Symptomatically, abstract expressionist artists of our own day have been interested in the sublime. We must hang on to that original aesthetic *charge*, in all its new expansions or structural analogues, for there to be any point or politics to the *bios* to which we belong. That originary but homeless pleasure, mixed with pain as it is, is what the sublime speaks.

Kantian Beginnings, Post-Kantian Sequels

6. Kant's theory of the sublime is the most striking example of an aesthetic supplement actually essential to the coherence of his overall system. Here, at the start of analysis of the sublime, the aesthetic is given both an honorarium and a poisoned chalice. The plot of what follows is to explain this conundrum. The very idea of the transcendental is revealed to have been at stake in the aesthetic. Sublimity establishes content for what had been an empty, formal cipher in Kant's first *Critique*. The transcendental ego was logically required as a notional point of attachment for experience to be possible. Experience had to be someone's in order to be experience. That someone, however, in Kant's analysis, remained this formal requirement and nothing more. If it were to have empirical or phenomenal content, then it would no longer transcend all individual occasions as it had to do in order to be the subject to which they all belonged. But without any defining individual circumstances, how could the transcendental ego have any content at all? It looked empty.

7. Kantianism properly understood, according to Kant's successor Fichte, found substance for Kant's transcendentalism once it was realised that Kant was actually, properly understood, a complete idealist. In his *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte dismisses Kant's extra-empirical realm of things-in-themselves, arguing in effect that they can drop out of the Kantian language-game altogether. If, as Kant maintains, experience is necessarily prescribed by what it is possible for us to conceptualise, then what objects might be outside these parameters is unthinkable, even nonsensical. They would not be objects for a

start. But since the objects of our experience cannot therefore be contrasted with any other "reality," their empirical reality becomes indistinguishable from so-called transcendental reality. Objects, on this understanding, reveal the subjective structure of experience we all share. Equally, that universally applicable subjective structure, that transcendental self, is only describable in terms of the objects that reveal it. Fichte unites Kant's two selves, transcendental and empirical. As Paul de Man was to do much later, he finds an irreducible phenomenalism articulating the possibility of, and so dismantling, Kantian metaphysics. Experience discloses the universal "I"; and this transcendental ego is exactly the consciousness given in experience, hence the famous Fichtean starting-point of "I = I", or, "consciousness = self-consciousness."

8. Unlike de Man, Fichte never discusses the sublime. His initial incorporation of the empirical with the transcendental obviates any need to find a language for what happens when we step outside our own conceptual boundaries to claim as experience what exceeds our power to define as experience. And unlike de Man he is not interested in finding the Kantian attempt to do so ideologically symptomatic. Fichte's philosophy has its problems. Although he never considers that his difficulties might require him to acknowledge that the Kantian sublime represents one version of a strategy indispensible for handling the subject's power to step outside any explanatory economy, other post-Kantians —Schelling and Hegel — clearly do see this need. Schelling's *Freiheitschrift*, so influential on Coleridge, postulates an original ontology or Absolute lying behind the world made possible by its original repression of its other possibilities. It becomes our human choice gratefully to accept the world we have in the wonder that there is something rather than nothing, or hubristically to undo it in an inappropriately Absolute nostalgia for the other possible worlds it might have been. In both cases, the extra-conceptual dimension beyond our current power to differentiate is acknowledged as an experience which will have its own, necessarily non-objective vocabulary. Comparably, Hegel's phenomenology reveals a logic premised on the unity of identity and non-identity when, again, the conceptual act of defining any essence is simultaneously a separation from or repression of it. This sundering immediately compels us on the long journey of reconciliation of concept and essence, idea and nature which his philosophy narrates. The repeated vanishings of our mastery of nature, and the consequent stoicism, scepticism and sheer unhappiness with which we negotiate this estrangement again have their own affective discourses which distinctively colour in the formalities of the process. Opposed in many other ways, these two post-Kantians at least share this philosophical appropriation of a vivid usage for a purpose symmetrical with that breach of conceptual economy catered for by the Kantian sublime.

9. It is important, though, to note that the symmetry is still with something which appears surplus to philosophical requirements. The difference of this usage from a purely logical demonstration of the limits of conceptual schematism is a prompt for the philosopher, not part of his or her philosophy. Nevertheless, the fact that the prompt cues a confrontation with philosophical limitation — the sense of what we cannot differentiate (Schelling) or a recurrent aporia never finally assuaged (Hegel) — lends it a *de facto* philosophical authority. This is the language philosophy may accredit but not itself supply; this discourse complements philosophical relativism with an Absolute expressed or fantasized in a variety of ways, by no means entirely literary.[2] "Hybrid" might be a better word referring to a time when the literary kinds were themselves being forced by the Jena Romantics at the heart of the post-Kantian endeavour to sacrifice their generic integrity in the interests of a larger, more progressive universal experience. Clearly a performative mode is replacing a constative mode at these moments of philosophical delegation. In her study of romantic performatives, Angela Esterhammer puts the post-Kantian difference, led by the performative force of self-expression, in terms of the socially productive speech-acts it deploys:

> When the term "I" enters into a discourse it breaks the rules of constative statement, deforming analytical sentences by introducing pragmatic issues such as the speaker's position, status, and frame of reference — which is precisely why speech-act philosophy

> adopts as its foundational utterance the explicit performative in the form "I promise," "I order," "I bet." (99)

Whether one takes a dependence on performatives to deconstruct philosophical pretension or to institute a conversation between philosophy and other discourses, one in which philosophy accredits stand-ins for its own authority, continually educating us in speculative possibility, is, it seems to me, the moot question.

10. Crucial here is the question of mastery. Stepping beyond the conceptual possibilities policed by philosophy, does the sublime let us retain control and re-establish in a new domain the historical version of that self (Eurocentric, male) that otherwise we might have seemed obliged to leave behind. (This, for example, would be the implication of the phenomenalism to which de Man reduces Kant's sublime adventures.) Or are new possibilities opened up, options even suggesting that we can abandon the notion of a unified self in an experience to which we can still sensibly belong? Can the sublime educate us in ways no longer entailing enlightened self-aggrandisement? Or would such noetic renunciation sever education from the ecstasies of the sublime? Kant's version of the sublime takes the latter view. The post-modern sublime we are most familiar with in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-Luc Nancy would beg to differ. To give up the attempt to resurrect an integrated self from its conceptual ruins puts us in contact with other ways of being a subject, previously threatening but now negotiable.

11. Kant's higher faculty of reason, which reasserts itself amid the rubble, constructs the sublime not as a delegation of philosophical authority to something else but as an ingenious presentation of continuity when his philosophical project appears to have foundered. We have, using Deleuze's model for understanding Kant, just been referred to a different committee ruled by a different Chairperson (10). In the new set-up, ideas of reason do not appear to us as categorical imperatives regulating the faculty of desire. In sublime experience, such ideas are aestheticised by the faculty of sensibility in order to acculture us to our rational vocation in another, equally fitting way. A moral and an aesthetic education are equally educative and educate us in the same kind of thing. It is against this uniformity that post-Kantian Jena mergers of philosophy and poetry are directed. Still more generally in *Symphilosophie*'s even less restricted discursive affiliations, the Jena *Fruhromantiker* encourage performances uncovering, if you like, the Unconscious for which, just like us, philosophy cannot legislate.

The Philosophical Unconscious

12. Kant's sublimity, then, finds content for experience when the self to whom such experience belongs appears to have passed beyond the (rational) bounds of educational possibility. That very appearance is discovered to educate us negatively in the rational vocation whose unique value is just this refusal to submit to the law of appearance. Post-Kantians rather claim that the Unconscious of philosophy thus revealed requires a different form of interpretation altogether, one in which non-philosophical discourses are recognised to have been cathected with conceptually unmanageable philosophical aspirations, and have to be interpreted accordingly. Philosophy, in other words, is in need of analysis. Slavoj Žižek's work on Schelling, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters*, exemplifies the easiness with which post-Kantian philosophical schemes lend themselves to Lacanian reading. In particular, Schelling's extraordinary text, *Die Weltalter* (*The Ages of the World*), postulates an original generative moment explaining the fact of consciousness and the coherence of the self. However, since that explanatory moment is by definition anterior to anything that can make sense, a fantasy of the Real, its needful manifestation must occur at a tangent to syntactic normality: an angle demanding all sorts of interpretative resourcefulness on the part of the reader wishing to position herself correctly. A straightforward recovery of "that primordial deed which makes a person (*Mensch*)

genuinely themselves" would deliver us to "boundless freedom," and "sink into the night of unconsciousness (*Bewusstlosigkeit*)" (*Die Weltalter* 183). We cannot bring back the beginnings that account for what we are: they "must not be called back," because that would amount to having them taken back (*zurückgenommen*). They remain, "an eternal beginning . . . a continuing, a never-ending act (*ein ewiger Anfang. . . ein beständige, ein nie aufhörende That*)" (183). As Freud claimed, there is no direct access to the Unconscious.

13. Education, in this instance, consists in the training to find and become competent in all sorts of alternatives to direct access. In Lyotard's still more radical form of this transference, we can say that if the dream-work sourcing our grasp of the philosophical Unconscious does not therefore think, we have to devise an openness learned in bodily alternatives to ratiocination altogether.[3] For a Lacanian, the ultimate acceptance of our otherness is submission to be spoken in a language in which we no longer command a unique subject-position. Behind the scenes, this acknowledgement of castration is generalised (and un-gendered) into the ability to use a language without feeling that any of it must belong to me in some irreducible way.[4] Meanings are public and are only changed in a public sphere. The Lacanian cure for despair at the consequent loss of an entire expression of the self or the real is to feel it not as loss but as empowerment or articulation. We have to understand the effect as preceding the cause. In other words, we accept that these absolutes of self and real, defined in opposition to our conscious knowledge of them, are what Žižek calls "retroactive products," constructed only with hindsight. But we construct them in shapes endowed with active powers which explain further the tools which discovered them, which expose the conscious limits of those tools' angle of approach or interest, and which therefore stimulate us to make our hermeneutic capable of new constructions that themselves will set in motion further retroactive initiatives. Again we encounter Schelling's "eternal beginning."

14. Post-Kantian philosophical delegation can be made to seem to be a kind of transference. More than this, as Žižek shows, the scene of psychoanalysis can appear mapped already in post-Kantian recoveries of the realms prohibited to Kantian cognition: nature or things-in-themselves and the freedom of the self, or, the real and the imaginary. Before his work on Schelling, he had made equally striking psychoanalytical incursions into Hegel. His spectacular, trademark swoops into contemporary popular culture from pinnacles of the dialectic tend to distract from the ways post-Kantianism itself was trying to maximise philosophy's discursive potential on its own terms. For Novalis, *Der Roman* is the exemplary form of writing because it "is intuitive performance, realization of an Idea" (*Werke*. II. 287). He describes an Idea as "an irrational quantity (*Grösse*), unpresentable (*unsetzbar*), incommensurable." Accordingly, he asks, "Should not the *Roman* grasp all species of style in a series (*Folge*) whose common spirit variously binds them together?" (269). Again, this stylistic generosity was primarily in response to the Kantian problem of presenting unpresentable ideas, for which the sublime and its symbols were meant to supplement philosophy's own limitations. The culture or "common sense" built up in the process projects a community negotiated in good taste rather than via ethical imperatives. While the kingdom of ends posited by the latter has often been linked to historical features of Kant's *Weltanschauung* – whether deplorably racist or encouragingly republican[5] – common sense has often appealed, ironically, because of its entirely formal uncovering of a logical space in which community could be constantly re-imagined and reconstituted, independently of the historical baggage one might expect to attach to so practical a prompt. Hence arises Novalis's freedom of interpretation when working within Kantian terminology. The formation of taste, *Bildung*, remains empty enough to model a lack of foreclosure arguably exemplary for the formation of a multi-cultural collective.

15. Hegel, though, as has been indicated, can be argued to conjure repeatedly a sublime scenario of sorts at each stage of his phenomenology. Eventually, though, a definitive breach in philosophical economy is arrived at, one from which philosophy cannot reconstitute itself so as to continue as before. In his

psychoanalytic reading of Hegel, Jon Mills writes of this moment,

> What becomes of Spirit when it can't effect its transition to reason, when it can't relinquish its quest for unchangeable individuality, when it can't let go of its being that has vanished – its nothingness? (156)

I hope this is now immediately recognizable as the recrudescence of a sublime moment exceeding existing modes of explanation. Mills is referring to the last stage of Hegelian self-consciousness: the Unhappy Consciousness, who, incapable of solving its problems on its own, must surrender authority to a mediator, an analyst, and ultimately, in the overall plot of Hegel's philosophy, must hand over all its individual, self-characterizing to evolving, plural social possibility. Hegel does not think he is squashing individuality here but rather connecting sublimity to political education. The sublimity, as one would expect Žižek to argue, is the fantasy of self-completion, the fantasy of a "Result" which actually "throws us back into the whirlpool, that is nothing but the totality of the route we had to travel in order to arrive at the result" (*Tarrying with the Negative* 156). Education does not stop. Hegelian education, on this reading, is the unending process whose unrestricted economy Hegel's recursive philosophy ("retroaction" is Žižek's word again) tries to figure.[6] Usually the affective content of the sublime, its mixture of pain and pleasure, terror and delight, seems too pressingly symptomatic in a psychoanalytic context to signify something so philosophically considered as the needful multiplication of discursive contexts of self-explanation. The emotions involved sound too painfully and fundamentally contradictory for us to see their irresolvable conflict as an abstract commendation of the virtues of hybrid self-expression and its political implications. So contested a response as the sublime must, as in Kant, be an inescapably polar one. At one pole, the sublime must be definitively negative, at the other it must be positive, and so we stay with Thomas Weiskel's division into a metaphoric (negative) or metonymic (positive) sublime (31). This means staying with an investigation of specific psychic mechanisms rather than the analysis of the discursive relief available when philosophical self-understanding comes up against its own conscious limits.

The Phenomenal Sublime

16. Then, one might say in keeping with Neil Hertz's famous study, we do reach "the end of the line." Poststructuralist thought sees here no exit from a rhetorical *en abyme* and analyses the virtues of romantic literature and philosophy as an expressive encounter with this impasse. Some poststructuralists, certainly, like Maurice Blanchot, stress the possibilities of an "infinite conversation" stemming from the transference of philosophical authority by which Jena post-Kantianism kept its universals progressive. Following Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy sees political thought as essentially touched by the sublime. Others, like Paul de Man, are historically selective in their freezing of the development of German idealism in Kant's third *Critique* and in a Kojèvian reading of Hegel's objections to Kant. De Man's interest in a Schlegelian view of irony as "permanent parabasis" is fed back into his repeated deconstruction of sublime excess. He described not a step out of the text he is reading into an expansive *Folge*, but simply another oscillation of the figural and the literal contributing to their undecideability. Or, as Hertz elaborates his own de Manian premise, we encounter what de Man calls a "figure of reading or of understanding" in which the "mutual reflexive substitution" of character in an author/reader of a text, when one appears to have blocked further understanding, keeps up the illusion of progress (*Rhetoric*, 70).[7] This improgressive repetition of "an inherent linguistic structure" (*Aesthetic Ideology*, 118) that is bound to manifest itself is used against the idea of sublime transgression and crossing in ways that have been deeply influential.

17. De Man argues that the sublime claims to surpass the phenomenal but in fact perpetuates it in another form. Both forms inevitably belong to the aforementioned "inherent linguistic structure." Cut adrift

from phenomenal experience, the sublime can only perform its own content. Performatives are just as linguistic in character as constatives. It follows that the sublime's noumenal pretensions, or claims to get on terms with a self-consciousness transcending the phenomenal, empirical self, are specious. In Kant the self is phenomenal through and through because it is linguistic. In de Man's words, "the term phenomenality here implies not more and not less than that the process of signification, in and by itself, can be known, just as the laws of nature as well as those of convention can be made accessible to some form of knowledge." It is what de Man calls "aesthetic ideology" to believe that in sublimity some more authentic expansion of our possibilities is sensed that is not reducible to "the prosaic materiality of the letter" (111).

18. This is de Man's bottom line. In a way, he can be seen to have transplanted Fichte's critique of Kant to a moment after the linguistic turn in philosophy. There is nothing which could rationalise philosophy's delegation of the responsibility for describing an extra-conceptual realm which no more exists than does an extra-linguistic description. The force of de Man's *reduction* then becomes political when it hears clearly the dissembled affirmation of philosophical, scientific mastery hiding behind the sublime accents of philosophical self-sacrifice. The only advance on Kant that de Man tolerates is that Hegelian diagnosis of this mastery hidden in slavery. The Hegelian move, though, has itself to be deconstructed. It only becomes an exemplary performance when it proclaims the redundancy of the aesthetic within the total Hegelian project while still, disablingly, allowing the aesthetic's accordingly enslaved position all the subversive force famously attributed to the slave in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Aesthetic Ideology*, 118).

19. What appears to have been taken from this comprehensive disposal of the Kantian sublime and its post-Kantian future is a lot less refined. For example, there is the assumption that Kant's sublime dissembling licenses all sorts of unjustifiable aggrandizements of the Enlightenment subject. These outrages happened at the expense not only of unenlightened subjects who could not be expected to keep pace with the advanced culture or 'common sense' established by Kantian aesthetics. For the Kantian subject as much as those over whom he extended his authority (women, the colonised, even the environment) also became a victim of high-mindedness that was really high-handedness. In other words, the dialectic of Enlightenment kicked in just as much in the sublime extension of itself as in its ordinary self-defeating exercises of conceptual mastery. If the non-identity, the knowing incapacity to find a philosophical equivalent for reality, which Adorno believed to be the aesthetic negative of this dialectic, is foreclosed, then we are trapped forever. Consequently, fairly empiricist historicizations of the Kantian sublime can look to de Man — or a much less exact assumption that the sublime has been successfully deconstructed — for support. The sublime shows the European sensibility fastened to a damaging exercise in self-consolidation. Its extensions of the techniques of the self repress still further our real nature — that freely self-differing subjectivity whose appearances deconstructions of the sublime have dismissively referred to as aesthetic ideology.

20. We can agree that this critique may have a point without having to concede that the educational value of the sublime is by definition aesthetic. This, at least, is the post-Kantian thrust of my argument. For the moment we might note that historicization of the sublime need not reveal unbridled imperialism on all fronts. The historical "embodiment" of Kantian reason, as Susan Meld Shell and others have argued, can be committed to a more interesting anthropology in harness to a more sophisticated historical sense than that of unlimited European expansion. And Peter de Bolla's still classic discussion, *The Discourse of the Sublime* uses linguistic materiality to keep alive the Kantian subject's self-difference, not to foreclose it:

> 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 in 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. (295)

This "disguise" is the way philosophy retains its hold on the discourse, aesthetic or otherwise, to which it has transferred authority. That "theoretical work" keeps the accredited discourse in the role of place-holder for a subject which, never objectified, can therefore always renew its story or narrative. Theory as such can never catch up with an educational process it has licensed to be always ahead of it. Hence the sublime remains, in terms of theory or philosophy, a fantasy of ultimate control, entirely imaginary. De Bolla, by the time he reaches this conclusion, has traced such discursive effects to related economic, oratorical and pictorial practices employing the sublime driver of excess. The rationale of the national debt, exploitation of a politically broadcast public persona unsubstantiated privately, licensing of pictorial or readerly transport — all historicize the transcendental core of the sublime. They remind us that many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century histories, characterising what James Chandler more recently called "the vehicular state" of the soul (30-2), tell a typical story of movement in excess of sensible confinement. All these histories assume a return upon an investment before that investment is realised; all are, in their different manners, constitutionally catching up on and in this way fantasizing a security that is theoretically impossible.

21. De Bolla's and Chandler's work usefully variegate historical context, and colour in its formal qualities in different discursive hues. Precisely this pluralism of interpretation supports applications of sublimity in recent thinking about personal identity and political community. While it is tempting to agree with Will Slocombe that "Lyotard appends Levinasian ethics to Kantian aesthetics" (61), contrary to this one could argue that the post-Kantian diversifying of the sublime already offers enough precedents, even if these do not especially grip Lyotard. Presenting the unpresentable, or un-coercively moralizing one's relation to the other, certainly recall a Kantian problematic. But the point Lyotard takes from Burke, for example, that the sublime shows that words affect us independently of representational power, opens a door to un-foretold innovations "to a lesser degree" implied by Kant's aesthetics (*The Inhuman*, 101), but perhaps only properly educed by his successors — and then in the context of the new generic performances to be found in the *Mischgedicht* or Roman. The Machiavellian republicanism of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, tolerant of a mixture of constitutions, appears to compromise their radicalism; but it is just this pragmatic, inventive accommodation (matching the linguistic pragmatism we saw Esterhammer attribute to post-Kantian performatives) of republican with monarchical interests that can model the difficult resolution of competing political views needed by multiculturalism now.

The Sublime Art of Multiculturalism

22. This is rather different from the "common sense" or "necessary communicability" built up in the course of agreeing on judgements of the sublime. It lends itself to imagining a context in which incommensurable judgements and the cultures to which they belong could co-exist. By contrast, Kantian aesthetics seem to model a singular subject exemplary for us all. To that extent, Nancy writes, "a certain determination of 'art' . . . is perhaps coming to its end, and with it the categorization of the fine arts accompanying it, and with these a whole aesthetic feeling and judgement, a whole sublime delectation" (*The Muses*, 38). However, the sublime is distinguished for Kant by its rendering of a contrapurposive (*Zweckwidrig*) purpose as purposive. The sublime disruption of the Kantian system of faculties mapping the logic of possible experience is redeemed by its sublimity, which is pleasurable, and so attuned to our faculty of sensibility, however perversely. This then translates, less peculiarly, into the Jena idea of a genre empowered by the contradictions it can tolerate in rendering the compass of human experience. Common sense, contra Lyotard, is then not a repressive reconstitution of

Enlightenment universals but something which can lead to a hybridity that, in turn, leads to post-modern deployment of sublime multiculturalism. And, indeed, the passage from Nancy continues: "It is not an end [of art and sublime delectation], but a renewed demand to grant rights to the naked presentation of the singular plural of obviousness — or of existence: it is the same thing" (38). However, this hybridity, or singular plural, in its turn, houses a post-modern dissemination of the subject that has been suspected of sheer incoherence or political inefficacy. To take a classic example of this hermeneutical suspicion from post-colonial theory, Gayatri Spivak wants her subaltern to speak and not lose her individual voice in the babble of an over-articulate liberalism. However sympathetic towards the colonised, subaltern class post-modern liberalism's critique of the unified subject is intended to be, it repeats colonial oppression when it refuses to hear that individual subaltern voice (202). As Bonnie Mann trenchantly puts this point of view,

> In the late twentieth century . . . the sublime re-emerges. But today, the 'others' of Euro-masculinity seem eager to accept the gift of the fragmented subject as a panacea for the megalomania of the unified rational hero of the Enlightenment . . . without enabling the postmodern subject to build a relation to place. . . .The resultant unintelligibility of the external political world (and others of that world), and of the natural world on which we depend, is the price we pay for a new postmodern fantasy of emancipation. (58-9)

23. I want to close by considering this use of "fantasy," intended to be pejorative but actually betraying the link between any political education through sublimity and its original aesthetic status — wondering how, in Nancy's terms, this might be "renewed." Fear of fantasy, fear of fiction in the pursuit of a just estimation of other people, might be compared to fear of abstraction in painting. Barnett Newman, in "The Sublime is Now," describes his art as responding to the irrelevance of traditional artistic subject-matter after the Great War and the Depression. For the narrative of art to continue, for expression still to be possible, there has to be a step into a present, a "now" whose story has not yet been told. The appearance of this expression, therefore, will be abstract, owing nothing to precedent and everything to its own particularity. To abstract is no longer to generalize but to take out of context. Frank O' Hara's "personism" captures this fusion of individuality and abstraction (O'Hara, xiii). O'Hara wants his poetry to exhibit "a true abstraction for the first time, really" (xiv). He seeks this through a kind of communicative obstruction, a kind of contrapurposiveness again, saying of one of his love-poems that "while I was writing it I was realising that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem" (xiv). This fantasy of an adequacy to the "now" surpassing even the immediacy of telecommunication is foregrounded by Newman in opposition to other communicative conventions. His abstract expressionism makes something out of what de Bolla called "the absence of a self-narrative of the sublime" which, in trumping phenomenal self-narrative, becomes a fantasy of adequate understanding — "the phantasmic experience of theory" (295).

24. Lyotard thinks that Newman "breaks with the eloquence of romantic art" (*The Inhuman*, 92), that Newman's abstraction indicates a discursive penury imposed by "a professional duty to bear witness that *there is*" (88). Earlier, though, he echoes even more distinctly than here a most eloquent Romantic, Schelling, when he attributes to Newman's expression "the wonder that there should be something rather than nothing" (85). The eloquence persists, surely, in the philosophical narrative with which the sublime moment breaks, and for which, as its own unique moment passes, we realise it has been fantasizing a continuation. To say that the moment passes, that Newman's art takes its place in a narrative, and that, consequently, new approaches to the "now" are required, once more extends Lyotard's commentary. Lyotard again describes a break with the Romantic sublime in the avant-garde reversal demanded, as he sees it, of Newman's title from "The Sublime is Now" to "Now the Sublime is like this." But post-Kantian historicism arguably takes things still further. If philosophy's accreditation of the aesthetic is to proceed beyond philosophy's own narrative boundaries, this breach will complicate and disturb the autonomy of the aesthetic as much as that of philosophy. The aesthetic

may well have to abandon its own independence, and in pursuit of its philosophical mission delegate its phantasmal mission to other activities, to other spheres of labour—which is perhaps to say no more than that the sublime is the limit case for both philosophy and art? The sublime educates us in the productive insufficiency of both.

25. Historically the sublime was put in place or brought into play to allow the continuation of philosophy by other means. In its acceptance of this task, though, this aesthetic moment conceded its subservience to another purpose. The politicization to which the sublime submits aesthetics allows other activities to free its phantasmal function from the aura of art. This is the penalty exacted from art for turning the breach in a discursive economy into its own aesthetic success. Once that tactic has been philosophically legitimated, there is no going back, and art itself is subject to the same logic. It must drink from its own poisoned chalice.[8]

26. The Kantian Friedrich Schiller avoided this Socratic sacrifice. He refused to accept that art is not irreplaceable by making an aesthetic education an education in the aesthetic.[9] Since the aesthetic's characteristic indeterminacy frees it from any vested interest or specialism, it can encompass everything: its sphere is universal. De Man calls this "a total idealism" (*Aesthetic Ideology*, 142). But de Man himself regards as "suspended" (184) Friederich Schlegel's post-Kantian deployment of the non-aesthetic non-understanding (*Unverständlichkeit*), and de Man's preference for "Non-understanding" over the usual "Incomprehensibility," is perfect for keeping the stakes visible here (183). In his 1800 essay *Über die Unverständlichkeit*, Schlegel uses the hybridity of an irony "that originates in more than one way," so ironizing itself, to allow the idea of a sublime education to arise from its transgression of its aesthetic original (*Werke*. II. 207). For Schlegel, non-understanding grounds "the welfare of families and nations" (*das Heil der Familien und der Nationen*) (208). The dramatic but not necessarily artistic improvisations by which human relationships fruitfully adapt and develop at familial and national levels cannot be prescribed. Unconvinced, de Man calls this the "expectation that one may have that deconstruction might be able to construct" (*Aesthetic Ideology*, 184). According to de Man, looking back from the sublime vantage-point we can see only the "chaos" (183) into which such exorbitance throws ordinary experience; or else we disguise the past we have supposedly left behind in order to hide from ourselves the fact that we could never have made the impossible step outside its phenomenal context anyway. But it is hard not to think that de Man's permanent suspense of Schlegelian "expectation" returns us to the Kantian / Schillerian aesthetic whose integrity or non-transferability is, paradoxically, the price we pay for its educative power. The discursive abstinence of Kantian aesthetics leaves us with the two most familiar endgames of art: an art rendered redundant à la Hegel or an art disappearing into its own idealism via its aestheticization of everything. A post-Kantian delivery of sublimity from its aesthetic matrix, such as Schlegel's *Unverständlichkeit*, releases the educative power of art. Translated into the critical extension of our self-understanding beyond existing canons, it has perpetuated a core human activity, a fantasy of our completion that, somewhere, is always in credit.

Notes

1 The survey of the meanings of sublimity I have found most sympathetic is Philip Shaw's *The Sublime*. He reaches more pessimistic conclusions, I think, but we agree about the theoretical range any commentary is obliged to cover.

2 Will Slocombe cleverly runs arguments about sublimity and nihilism parallel to each other and summarizes Žižek's aperçu that "Kant argues that sublimity is the failure of the mental object to present itself in language, rather than the failure of language to present the object" (45). He also pinpoints a Hegelian moment in Judith Butler's exoneration of performative contradiction: "performative contradiction is crucial to the continuing

revision and elaboration of historical standards of universality" (89-90). Both examples show a (not necessarily literary) sublime linguistic performance performing a service for philosophy.

3 See "The Dream-work Does Not Think," 19-56.

4 See Žižek's exposition of this in *The Abyss of Freedom / Ages of the World: An essay by Slavoj Žižek with the text of Schelling's 'Die Weltalter' (second draft, 1813) in English translation by Judith Norman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 43.

5 See Susan Meld Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), for encouraging republicanism.

6 Obviously this approach is set against Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading in "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" in *Writing and Difference*.

7 See Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line*, 220. That this substitutive oscillation can continue almost endlessly within the same text is shown by Cynthia Chase in "The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Rhetorical Reading in Book V of *The Prelude*." See in particular her remark on 556: "Language ordinarily covers up the effects of effaced figuration; it erases the effacement of the figure. In this text, the cover is cancelled and the erased effacement reinscribed, in an act of disfiguration."

8 Within this education out of an originally aesthetic moment into its extension in other discourses, still finer discriminations are to be made. Catherine Maxwell, in *The Female Sublime* (216-21), distinguishes between poems which seek to "enact their own death" and those which, less tragically and daringly, achieve a quieter dissolution better represented as figuring a frequently advantageous sexual surrender of male to female authority. Variations in sublime education can then characterize historical changes, in this case the transition from Romanticism to a Victorian pre-modernism represented by Swinburne.

9 See my explanation in "Schiller's Temporizing," Chapter One of *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

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The Sublime and Education

Dumbstruck: *Christabel*, the Sublime, and the Willing Suspension of Disbelief

Anne C. McCarthy, CUNY Graduate Center

> Do you think poetry was ever generally understood—or can be? Is the business of it to tell people what they know already, as they know it and so precisely that they shall be able to cry out—"Here you should supply *this*—*that*, you evidently pass over, and I'll help you from my own stock"? It is all teaching, on the contrary, and the people hate to be taught.
> —Robert Browning to John Ruskin, 10 December 1855[1]

I.

1. Reading *Christabel* makes you stupid.

2. This, at least, is among the central charges that William Hazlitt's unsigned Examiner review levels against Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Christabel, Kubla Khan, and the Pains of Sleep* (1816). Coleridge's "dim, obscure, and visionary" poem, Hazlitt writes, "is more like a dream than a reality. The mind, in reading it, is spell-bound. . . . The faculties are thrown into a state of metaphysical suspense and theoretical imbecility" (Jackson 207). This is not a complaint that the poem is merely confusing: the language of "metaphysical suspense" and "theoretical imbecility" discloses an anxiety about something more profoundly disruptive, a stupidity that resists clarification or elucidation. Hazlitt's language is thus an excessive response to a text to which, by his own implication, there is no possible response; it is nearly impossible to speak intelligently about stupidity. Most dangerously, the mind whose operations have been suspended in this way does not even know that it has been seduced into error—much less how to go about correcting it.

3. There are, of course, a set of lesser objections in this infamous review that have to do with what Hazlitt perceived as intentional obfuscation and unnecessary confusion on Coleridge's part. But these remain, for the most part, restricted and containable: confusion can be cleared up; ignorance can be educated. A correct answer may be supplied in the place of an inadequate one. Stupidity, by contrast, is not reducible to being confused or not-knowing. "[S]tupidity," as Avital Ronell argues, "does not allow itself to be opposed to knowledge in any simple way, nor is it the other of thought. It does not stand in the way of wisdom, for the disguise of the wise is to avow unknowing. . . . [T]he question of stupidity is not satisfied with the discovery of the negative limit of knowledge; it consists, rather, in the absence of a relation to knowing" (5). The difference between stupidity and more limited categories of experience such as confusion and ignorance consists in stupidity's missed connection with knowing. At the same time, even under the conditions of this absent relation, stupidity remains on the scene, cultivating the proximity that allows it to resist efforts to bring it under control and occasionally masquerading as intelligence itself. This structure is already being worked out in Hazlitt's excessive response to *Christabel*: "metaphysical suspense" and "theoretical imbecility" have a tendency to overwhelm efforts to establish the critical distance necessary to distinguish a stupid poem from a stupid reader.

4. *Christabel*, of course, is not a stupid poem, nor was Hazlitt a stupid reader. But although *Christabel* does not pose any great difficulties in terms of its language, versification, or theme, it does tend to confront its readers with the experience of stupidity. Its narration is characterized by gaps and hesitations, breaking off abruptly just as it seems really to be getting started. Close reading seems to invite the experience of stupidity instead of keeping it a bay: the more carefully we read and think

about the poem the *more* stupid we are likely to feel. Quite simply, our faculties *are* liable to be thrown into a state of "theoretical imbecility"; we *do* risk the paralysis of "metaphysical suspense." Uncritical, even stupid readers (we could, at least, surmise) would find themselves more comfortable with seeming excesses like the mindless chatter of the poem's opening sections' catechism of trivia: "Is the night chilly and dark? / The night is chilly, but not dark" (l. 14-15).[2] Though not every reader of *Christabel* has articulated the problem of the poem in terms of stupidity, modern scholarship does suggest an uneasy relationship among poetic ambiguity, confusion, and outright stupidity. Susan Eilenberg, for instance, locates the "difficulty of speaking properly in or about 'Christabel'" in the poem's broad undermining of identity: "There can be no language proper to an undefinable subject" (89). Anya Taylor notes how the poem both attracts and repels readers through "lulling, almost lobotomized repetitions" and "metrical hesitations and forward rushes" that threaten, in her view, to break down readers' powers of understanding—or simply leave them "transfixed" like the Wedding Guest under the eye of the Ancient Mariner ("Phantom Soul" 707). More directly, Karen Swann writes that Christabel initially "frightened its reviewers, not because it was such a successful tale of terror, but because they couldn't decide what sort of tale it was" ("Enigma of Form" 160). The poem, in Swann's rendering, overwhelms its readers with so many interpretive choices that interpretation itself becomes impossible. The madness, stupidity, and speechlessness that afflict Christabel's eponymous heroine "redound on the reader, who continually feels mad or just stupid, unable to 'tell' how to characterize the verse at any given point" ("Enigma of Form" 162).

5. Envisioning a reader unable to "tell," Swann's comment allows us to speculate that the best idea of what it's like to read *Christabel* comes from Christabel herself. The first encounter between her and Geraldine is marked by Christabel's confusion at the moan that emanates from behind that tree: "what it is, she cannot tell,—" (42). Geraldine's body is, of course, described only as "A sight to dream of, not to tell!" (248), the line that Hazlitt considered an obscene gesture masquerading as "an exquisite refinement in efficiency" (Jackson 206) and one that has generated nearly two centuries of critical debate. By the end of the poem, Christabel has been emptied of her selfhood and is left stuttering, drawing a blank, unable to maintain her presence of mind: "what she knew she could not tell, / O'er master'd by the mighty spell" (607-8). As these examples remind us, not being able to "tell" is only partially a matter of not being able to speak. It also marks a more general breakdown of the powers of classification and discrimination, including the ability to "tell" the difference between truth and fiction. Moreover, each of these instances of not being able to "tell" can also be read as occasions of and for stupidity, as tests that Christabel, the narrator, and the reader, are unable to pass.

6. Given these conditions, the smart thing to do may be to run away, following the trajectory mapped out by Percy Bysshe Shelley. According to Doctor Polidori's anecdote, the "sight to dream of, not to tell" caused Shelley to hallucinate women with eyes for nipples and run screaming from the room where Byron was reading the poem aloud.[3] Yet, despite all its associations with stupidity and even fear, *Christabel* is also regarded as an eminently "teachable" poem. In her contribution to the 1991 anthology *Approaches to Teaching Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, Taylor lists the "accessibility of the narratives and of their poetic techniques; the mysterious cruxes in the poems that provoke discussions about life's questions; [and] the complexity of crime, suffering, guilt, and family tension in the poems" ("Teaching *Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*" 128) among the qualities that make *Christabel* and the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* popular with her students. Swann, in the same volume, comments on the way that "[o]ur experience of genre . . . affects what signs we take to be significant. It also informs our capacity to interpret them. For merely to know that signs mean *something* is of course not to know *what* they mean" (123), and suggests that the poem may be used to focus students' attention on the contingency of reading practices, particularly when they come to bear on the poem's more difficult questions. Employing a strict set of learned reading practices can backfire, Swann implies, with a text like *Christabel* that "seems at least uneasily aligned with the genres it also invites us to reflect on" (124). Mary Favret also uses *Christabel* as an occasion for talking about gender and genre in the

context of Romantic literature. Not all questions about the text are created equal, Favret observes, and recovering the importance of what we might otherwise dismiss as "stupid" questions exposes the text's structuring of questioning itself to obscure some of Coleridge's intertextual relationships with female prose writers in a Gothic tradition.

7. All three of these authors—and the others who contribute essays to *Approaches*—attempt to bring "metaphysical suspense" and "theoretical imbecility" under control by rewriting them in terms of confusion and incomprehension. The questions that *Christabel* raises may not be fully resolved, but the ability to raise questions at all suggests that the initially overwhelming feeling of stupidity has given way to a "teachable moment," in which we have the opportunity to learn something. In other words, if we cannot clarify Geraldine's identity or Christabel's culpability, we can at least comprehend something about how and why the text makes those kinds of determinations impossible. To say, as Favret does, that our "confusion has been written into the poem" (114) means that our stupidity is no longer entirely our fault. Much like the suspenseful narratives of the later nineteenth century, *Christabel* can invite us to reflect on our own reading practices and perhaps learn how to improve them. Caroline Levine argues that Victorian realist "suspense fiction was all about teaching readers to suspend judgment" (2)—a claim that resembles the one that the contributors to *Approaches* make about *Christabel*. Similar too is Levine's description of how the "pleasures of suspenseful narrative" lie in the surrender of expectations and certainties, giving the self to "the experience of anxiety, the uneasy sense that the world may not conform to predictable outcomes. To have an experience of suspenseful uncertainty is to acknowledge that there is more than one credible ending to the narrative, more than one potentially plausible ending to the mystery" (47). But the "pleasures" of the suspense in Levine's archetypal narrative of discovery depend on the text itself achieving a kind of closure that never happens in *Christabel*. For this reason, approaches to *Christabel* that emphasize how the poem can better help us understand, say, Romantic literature or gender politics—as obviously crucial as they are in nearly every way—do not fully address Hazlitt's "metaphysical suspense" and "theoretical imbecility," this unrestricted, excessive stupidity that resists recovery into an epistemologically- or pedagogically-productive narrative.

8. But *Christabel* is not written to make us feel stupid just for the sake of feeling stupid. It is my contention that we should see the text and experience its relation to stupidity within the framework of what Coleridge, in the famous passage from chapter 14 of *Biographia Literaria*, names "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith" (*BL* 2.6).[4] Coleridge, as is well known, coins this phrase to describe a reading practice based on the acceptance of incredible elements in his supernatural poetry—specifically, *Christabel* and the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Broadly speaking, suspension of disbelief describes the process through which authentic affect can be experienced through an explicitly fictional text. Elements that are clearly outlandish, Gothic, or supernatural require only that we assent to them as fictions. Once we have accepted that premise and agree not to be distracted by its conflict with what we know as reality, we may more clearly recognize the "human interest and semblance of truth" (*BL* 2.6) that remains as the familiar among the unfamiliar. However, the willing suspension of disbelief is not simply "the happy relinquishment of the reality principle" (Swann, "Wandering Mother" 157-58) that allows us to enjoy and perhaps learn from fantastic and otherwise fictional scenarios. While suspension shares with narrative suspense a respect for the unexpected, it ultimately *breaks* with teleological inevitability so that it can no longer be recovered in an epistemologically-productive narrative. Holding back the movements of judgment and doubt, the willing suspension of disbelief is equally a giving-over of the self without limit or expectation to an experience of possibility—whether of stupidity or the sublime.

9. The feeling of the sublime, for Coleridge, consists in the "Suspension of our Comparing Power" (*Shorter Works* 1.597). This suspension of our powers of comparison is analogous to the inability to "tell" that is so pervasive in *Christabel*, and following Coleridge's use of suspension, I locate the

occasion of the sublime in the many moments in *Christabel* in which "telling" is disrupted. These moments of suspension may be read as figures for the disruption of cognition (and, indeed, the stupidity) associated with sublime feeling, particularly as Coleridge found it described in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790). "*That is sublime*," Kant writes, "*in comparison with which everything else is small*" (105). Included in that "everything else" are our own mental powers, however considerable they are in other contexts. "[C]ontrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination" (Kant 99), the sublime can be said to make us stupid—irredeemably, irretrievably so. Everyone becomes dumbstruck when confronted with the sublime (provided, of course, that they are "smart" enough to recognize the moment for what it is). That sublime feeling (if all goes well) ultimately expands our imagination rather than grinding it into dust is a testament to the power of reason, lifting us beyond ourselves, so that the "negative pleasure" of the Kantian sublime arises from "the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger" (98).

10. I read Kant's "momentary inhibition" as a kind of suspension writ large, one that authorizes a broad reconsideration of the willing suspension of disbelief. By approaching the willing suspension of disbelief from the direction of the sublime (rather than, say, the Gothic), we "learn" a receptive posture poised between knowing and not knowing, a suspension that accepts the risk of stupidity as a condition of sublime possibility. Suspension, moreover, anticipates the practice of reparative reading as developed in the late work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Where the "hermeneutics of suspicion" seeks to anticipate and avoid being surprised, reparative reading, like the willing suspension of disbelief, remains open to the unexpected and the contingent. Sedgwick writes,

    > to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. (146)

    To "experience surprise" suggests a process of learning that is not exhausted in attaining a single objective; it is rather ongoing and potentially inexhaustible, a process that is perpetually realized but never mastered, befitting the "lessons" of poetry and the sublime.

II.

11. Writing of a scene in Rousseau's *Confessions*, Ronell observes that "for the sensitive soul, nearly every social encounter involves a secret testing system on which one is bound to do poorly," and goes on to wonder "whether it is dumber . . . to have failed the test or not to have known in the first place that he was being tested" (47). Heading towards the oak tree with the intention to "pray / For the weal of her lover that's far away" (31-2), the restless Christabel resembles nothing so much as a student about to be presented with a pop quiz on material that she did not know was going to be on the test. "What it is, she cannot tell": in this initial iteration, not being able to "tell" (in both the narrative and comparative senses) is marked by the presence of mute bodily markers of surprise that reflect something like "the momentary inhibition of the vital forces" (Kant 98). Christabel "leaps up suddenly" (39) at the sound from behind the oak. In the several lines before she is able to collect herself enough to be able to speak again, the narrator intervenes to attempt to "hush" her "beating heart" (55). The unexpected appearance of the "damsel bright / Drest in a silken robe of white" (60-1) serves as a prelude to the more important examination, wherein Christabel must decide on the appropriate response to Geraldine's story. Geraldine avows her own confusion as she attempts to narrate her story of kidnapping (and perhaps worse). That she has (perhaps) "lain in fits" (90) suggests a more extreme version of Christabel's shock. About her captors, Geraldine can only say "Whither they went, I cannot tell—" (97), speaking

the terms of Christabel's mute surprise.

12. The gaps in Geraldine's story have typically rendered her a figure of suspicion. The seemingly inadvertent self-dividing expressed in a line like "Me, even me, a maid forlorn" (80) comes to foreshadow her ultimate duplicity—and not even a particularly clever duplicity at that. Responding with sympathy and openheartedness, Christabel puts her faith in the authenticity of Geraldine's tale and invites this mysterious figure into her home. In so doing, she, at least in the eyes of the vast majority of the poem's readers, fails the most basic test presented to any reader of fantastic literature—telling the difference between fiction and fact. The coding of this action as a failure is largely a matter of genre and of a failure to recognize generic conventions as conventions. Swann observes that "[f]or Christabel, but also, for any absorbed reader of circulating library romances, Geraldine's story of abduction works as a seduction—Christabel recognizes Geraldine as a certain type of heroine and embraces her" ("Wandering Mother" 152). In a certain sense, Christabel fails the test presented by Geraldine because she read the wrong assignment. Walter Jackson Bate puts it more simply: Geraldine's story "would convince no one except an innocent and rather obtuse maid" (68). Christabel suffers because she reads like a girl.

13. I do not wish to revisit the longstanding debates on the generic status of *Christabel* insofar as they deal with the question of whether the poem is a Gothic text, a parody thereof, or something more complicated.[5] What is more important for my purposes is Swann's description of how Coleridge's deployment of the most excessive tropes of "Gothic machinery" ("Wandering Mother" 159-60) functions as a commentary on the production of literary convention itself, destabilizes its readers' presuppositions about genre, and teaches them to be more careful about making assumptions. Although, as Swann notes in her *Approaches* essay, the only person seriously to advance the idea that Geraldine might be telling the truth is Christabel herself, the indeterminacy of the poem leaves more room for speculation than it does grounds for a better-informed interpretation. About the only thing on which readers do agree is that Christabel's interpretation of Geraldine is wrong. Foregrounding the generic constructedness of Christabel's perceived stupidity or naiveté has a somewhat troubling implication for the poem's more "educated" readers as well. With more interpretive practices at our disposal, we bear an even greater risk of looking stupid by choosing the wrong one or by adhering too closely to a single seemingly correct approach. This is precisely the kind of frustrating situation liable to provoke the "hysterical" reactions that Swann and others have associated with *Christabel*'s critics.

14. More broadly, Christabel forces us to face the possibility that education is no guarantee against stupidity. Although we might at least provisionally accept Ronell's claim about the absence of a relationship between stupidity and knowledge, we must also recognize that stupidity maintains a troubled intimacy with education, undermining the latter's claims to epistemological certainty. At times, stupidity declares that it has nothing more to learn, drowning out the teacher's voice with a kind of "monumental arrogance" (Ronell 13). In many other cases, it operates more stealthily, running interference against pedagogical aims or simply consisting in pointing out their excesses. It is entirely possible, for instance, to misinterpret a pedagogical scene as something else, being too stupid to realize that you are supposed to be learning something. But you can also become so focused on your presence in the pedagogical scene that you fail to absorb a more important lesson. Indeed, the question of conscious learning is itself open to debate. Sedgwick asks, "Is it true that we can learn only when we are aware of being taught?" (153). "Intelligence itself," Ronell writes, "depends on a withholding pattern that in some cases matches the irremediable reluctance of the stupid. For its part, stupidity can body-snatch intelligence, disguise itself, or, indeed, participate in the formation of certain types of intelligence with which it tends to be confused" (10). The body-snatching capabilities of stupidity mean that it is almost never an easy endeavor to establish whether learning is taking place or has taken place in an educational setting, or whether these scenes are merely generating armies of automata (or zombies), answering machines ready to spit out facts about which they "know" nothing.

15. *Christabel*, failing to be one thing or another, or even to define the terms among which it refuses to decide, makes it particularly difficult to distinguish a stupid poem from a stupid reading—or a stupid reader. Of course, only a "stupid" poem—that is, a poem not worth reading in the first place—gives away all of its meaning up front. But as most of us know from experience, it is possible to read a text carefully and according to all the best practices of close reading and still to produce a stupid interpretation. Hazlitt's "metaphysical suspense" and "theoretical imbecility" suggest the workings of this persistent yet elusive strain of stupidity that cannot be counteracted by more careful reading practices, a better grasp of plot, or even an outright rejection of the text at hand. Criticizing Coleridge for a kind of willful indeterminacy, Hazlitt represents suspension as an affliction to be overcome or mastered rather than a potentially productive critical posture: "The fault of Mr. Coleridge is, that he comes to no conclusion. He is a man of that universality of genius, that his mind hangs suspended between poetry and prose, truth and falsehood, and an infinity of other things, and from an excess of capacity, he does little or nothing" (Jackson 205). Intelligence that over-runs its boundaries may become stupidity, just as, in Hazlitt's description, Coleridge's great abilities lead to a kind of paralysis whose results are indistinguishable from those of incapability.

16. The willing suspension of disbelief, this seemingly desirable and enjoyable forgetting of the restrictions imposed on us by reality, seems at first to have little in common with a presumably unwilling relinquishment of the critical faculties or with the cynical authorial posturing that Hazlitt attributes to Coleridge. Yet suspension of disbelief is frequently invoked, especially in popular usage, to acknowledge authorial and creative lapses that must be overlooked by generous readers, and to warn those readers not to become ensnared by lies, manipulation, and incompetence.[6] Indeed, it is difficult to escape the possibility that the willing suspension of disbelief encourages a foolhardy holding back of one's judgment at the moment when that judgment is most needed. There may seem to be a rather short distance from the reading practice Coleridge prescribes for supernatural poetry to the "forc'd unconscious sympathy" (597) that overtakes Christabel at the end of the poem.

17. Nevertheless, I believe we should be careful of either collapsing these two kinds of suspension or proposing an easy opposition that offers skepticism and paranoia as correctives to overly-accepting credulousness. Recent work by Michael Tomko provides a welcome corrective to tendencies to see the suspension of disbelief as passivity, consumption, or simple-minded acceptance taken to a delusional extreme, describing it rather as a "combination of active engagement and vulnerable receptivity [that] promises to provide not only a new perspective that comes from the other but also an experience otherwise unavailable" (244). Poetic faith, in Tomko's reading, becomes an educational posture to the extent that it interrupts the rush to judgment and allows us to learn from others whose experience would otherwise be inaccessible to us. To this extent, Tomko's understanding of poetic faith anticipates the pedagogical functions of narrative fiction that I mentioned earlier. Placing the phrase within the context of Coleridge's extensive theological writings on faith and belief, Tomko rightly apprehends the dual structure of mental activity and vulnerability that is part of suspended disbelief. Yet, he observes that, curiously, this promise of aesthetic communication across political and ideological lines fails even within the *Biographia* itself. Tomko cites Coleridge's dismissive review of Charles Maturin's *Bertram*—reprinted in the penultimate chapter of the *Biographia*—as an exercise in "bad faith." Coleridge disingenuously "attend[s] constantly to meta-level stagecraft"—precisely the unavoidable elements in a theatrical production that require the suspension of disbelief—"in an effort to disconnect readers from the play's action" (247). The more generous critical work of poetic faith remains unrealized even within Coleridge's own text.

18. Tomko's conception of what Coleridge means by "poetic faith" is limited and provisional, always fully under the volitional control of the critic: "a reader never surrenders his or her power of disbelief or dissent. This power is suspended, but not relinquished. It remains under the control of the will … . Although there is an initial investment in the work of the author and a willingness to listen that could

lead to dialogue across political or sectarian barriers, disbelief can re-emerge at any time, shattering the illusion, debunking the poetic faith placed in an author, and launching a critique" (245-46). Tomko does not deny the potential pitfalls of suspended disbelief, but he does identify an active critical mind as a guardrail against epistemological embarrassment. Because he places so much emphasis on the saving intervention of the active critical mind, Tomko underplays some of the more radical possibilities of Coleridge's term. Since Coleridge also considers the sublime to be a form of suspension, I suspect that he is talking about something more capacious and risky than what Tomko describes. A conception of poetic faith and suspended disbelief that would not simply be, as Tomko puts it, "wrecked upon the rocks of the romantic stage and fractured by Coleridge's ambivalence concerning his past and political opinions" (243) must include and affirm the uncontrollable as well as the volitional.

19. Suspension, as I argue above, is constituted through the dual movement of holding together and giving over, and is an active posture of self-control that is also irreducibly a surrender of the will. Displaying a "willingness to attend to alterity" (Levine 14), suspension holds in abeyance what seems to be natural or inevitable: the rush to judgment, the machinations of law, the teleological progression of plot. In the case of the suspension of disbelief, the movement consists not merely in withholding but also in a deliberate giving-over that surrenders to the unforeseen and the unexpected, opening a space of possibility and uncertainty that is not always easily recovered by a narrative or other determinative process. The suspension of judgment, similarly, works to maintain two or more compelling yet mutually exclusive possibilities without determination. Yet, even as it resists temporal unfolding and discursive determination, suspension functions as a constitutive discontinuity, marking the experience of the present moment by interrupting it or shaping subjective consciousness by revealing something beyond it, something beyond our control or even our powers of anticipation. It is both liberating and potentially dangerous, unsettling seemingly secure modes of signification by a refusal to be one thing or the other: the negative tone of Hazlitt's "metaphysical suspense" reminds us that suspension may have any number of undesirable consequences.

20. One of the qualities that suspension shares with the sublime is a potential to be constitutive and elevating through the spontaneous relation to something beyond ourselves, something beyond simple sensibility. This process is ongoing and not completed in the same sense that one may finish reading a book or memorize a set of rules. One of the most striking examples of this kind of experience in Coleridge's poetic work comes in the representation of the infant Hartley's first stirrings of consciousness in "The Nightingale": "he beholds the moon, and hush'd at once / Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently" (102-3). While at first this moment does not seem to include the element of intentionality necessary fully to qualify as a *willing* suspension, we should read these lines as the infant's first stirrings of that volitional consciousness—here marked by its absence or suspension. It is perhaps the first time the child finds himself capable of being affected by something beyond his body, and it functions as a kind of foundational educational moment that makes learning possible.

21. The sublime, for Kant, consists in a similar "expansion of the imagination" (105) beyond sensibility that allows for a transitory supersensible awareness of the power of reason. Contemplating scenes such as "shapeless mountain masses" or "the gloomy raging sea," Kant writes, "the mind feels elevated in its own judgment of itself . . . and abandons itself to the imagination and to a reason that had come to be connected with it—though quite without a determinate purpose, and merely expanding it—and finds all the might of the imagination still inadequate to reason's ideas" (113). What Kant identifies as the "pleasure" of the sublime is not, of course, a result of the feeling of our mental inadequacies as inadequacies, but arises instead from the experience of striving, of pushing ourselves beyond our capacities, of moving from humility (or humiliation) to respect for our own humanity as elevated over nature and the merely sensuous. Slavoj Žižek describes the Kantian sublime, rooted in an experience of "nature in its most chaotic, boundless, terrifying dimension," as an experience of pure, absolute failure: "The Sublime . . . is the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view,

in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable" (203). What is revealed in the sublime moment can never be called "content," nor can the form of this relationship be fixed into a skill that can be mastered and taught to others. Thus, too, the sublime remains "beyond all comparison" (Kant 105), even to other feelings that might be called sublime. Rather, it is a performative relationship, realized every time for the first time, unpredictably and uniquely.

22. What we *can* learn, at least according to Kant, is the posture of disinterestedness demanded by aesthetic judgments, wherein "what we want to know is not whether we or anyone cares, or so much as might care, about the thing's existence, but rather how we judge it in our mere contemplation of it (intuition or reflection)" (Kant 45). While this disinterestedness is at best fragile in any situation involving the sublime or the beautiful, it is particularly difficult to maintain when it is a question of Kant's dynamical sublime. We are not likely to be immediately afraid for our lives at the astonishing sight of a landscape that stretches infinitely past our view. We may well have that reaction to "threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky . . . volcanoes with all their destructive power" (Kant 120)—and rightly so, since these are forces that our human bodies could not possibly withstand. To make these situations available to the aesthetic judgment of sublimity, which requires disinterestedness even in the matter of one's own life, Kant interposes a distance between the subject of the sublime feeling and these powerful natural forces:

> Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle. Yet the sight of them becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, *provided we are in a safe place*. And we call these objects sublime because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual middle range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence. (120, emphasis added)

The possibility of Kant's dynamical sublime depends on a simultaneous posture of knowing and not-knowing that can only be achieved through something like a willing suspension. Kant almost immediately goes on to insist that the feeling of pleasure produced by the dynamical sublime "loses nothing from the fact that we must find ourselves safe in order to feel this exciting liking, so that (as it might seem), since the danger is not genuine, the sublimity of our intellectual ability might also not be genuine" (121). The safe place is a kind of non-fictional fiction, a mental projection that ostensibly raises our soul's "fortitude" beyond the cares of the body without really placing that body at risk. But this projection is nonetheless a kind of strategic misrecognition calculated to create, however narrowly, the conditions of this authentic experience. Thomas Weiskel observed more than thirty years ago that "the mind convinced of its own sublimity cannot in fact experience the sublime moment" (77). If, on the one hand, we cannot make of these mindless, overwhelming natural forces an object of present fear and still call them sublime, neither can we rest too firmly in the safety of our own position. To avoid becoming too secure, too complacent, we must somehow know and not know what we are experiencing. Or—to put it in less binary terms—we must cultivate a kind of awareness of our safety that does not turn into knowledge of the same. The possibility of the sublime experience lasts only as long as this willing suspension can be maintained. At the moment we feel safe enough, grounded enough to call the experience "sublime," the suspension is broken. We return to the order of knowledge, language, and emotion recollected in tranquility.

III.

23. Among the contributors to *Approaches to Teaching Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, Mary Favret most directly discusses the relevance of the willing suspension of disbelief to *Christabel*, though she makes it the central term in a project of strategic obstruction: "Coleridge's push for 'poetic faith,' the 'willing

suspension of disbelief' . . . especially in *Christabel*, leaves readers scratching their heads in perplexity and submitting, gratefully or begrudgingly to the inscrutable genius of the poet" (110). *Christabel* is written, she claims, in a way that "draws our allegiance away from natural causality and toward unnatural explanation" (114). Certain kinds of questions about the text, she notes, become "stupid" by reflecting disbelief that has been insufficiently suspended in the face of the fictions that the poem creates in order to function. For Favret, willing suspension must be at least partially unlearned and overcome by "validating" those seemingly stupid questions that expose, for instance, how the poem makes female sexuality something of an unspeakable horror, even if it means shattering other illusions.

24. Perhaps the most notorious instance of this kind of authorial misdirection masquerading as a lesson in poetic faith is the narrator's description of Geraldine, or, more accurately, his refusal to describe her body as it appears to Christabel in the young lady's chamber. Perversely, the narrator directs the reader to look at Geraldine's body—"Behold! her bosom and half her side" (246)—only to block our view: "A sight to dream of, not to tell!" (247). Hazlitt, who was familiar with the manuscript version of *Christabel*, had protested the published version's omission of "a line which is absolutely necessary to the understanding of the whole story" (Jackson 206), because it had more clearly identified Geraldine as a witch. The interests of "propriety" would seem to be better served in this situation by a more explicit "telling"—that is, by a description specific enough to limit the number of constructions that could be put on Geraldine's identity and, thus, on the poem as a whole. What Favret sees as limiting and obstructionist, Hazlitt finds too disturbingly ambiguous, too dangerously unlimited. Yet both of these responses seem implicitly to privilege the passage's content (what Coleridge does or does not tell us) over the structure of the text's refusal to "tell" at the key moment of Geraldine's unveiling. This excessively articulated silence around Geraldine's body returns the poem to the unrestricted economy associated with stupidity and the sublime, allowing readers to imagine a seemingly endless set of horrors, or, for that matter, utter banalities, to fill in the gap.

> In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
> Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
> Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow
> This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
> But vainly thou warrest,
> For this is alone in
> Thy power to declare,
> That in the dim forest
> Thou heard'st a low moaning,
> And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair:
> And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
> To shield her and shelter her from the damp air. (255-66)

What occurs in these lines is not simply a prohibition on all speech, though it has often been read that way. The "spell" instantiates a division between knowing and speaking—a knowledge gap, so to speak, that is embedded within the poem's form as well as its plot—and it is not merely a matter of insufficient knowledge but of an inappropriate kind of knowledge, that which cannot be communicated. It is also a kind of lesson, though one that is provocatively incommensurable to what we as readers have taken for the "reality" of the poem. What we learn about through this reductive retelling is largely the means by which reality and our knowledge thereof is performatively constructed through language. And the subsequent generations of readers who will struggle to establish just what, in fact, has happened in *Christabel* are, in Geraldine's narration, offered a compellingly simple story. Gone are the chattering questions, the howling mastiff bitch, and Christabel's beating heart. Where we had originally seen Geraldine in "distress" (71) and stumbling over her words "for weariness" (72), we now see a composed "bright lady" who does not speak at all: there is no longer anything to "tell." This more

elegant version of *Christabel* emphasizes Geraldine's physical attractiveness over her uncanny apparition and represents Christabel as being motivated by charity more than confusion. Limiting Christabel's "power to declare" to that which is seemingly straightforward (if inaccurate), the spell inaugurates a narrative that, in a sense, makes fewer demands on an audience's willingness to suspend disbelief. Indeed, it is almost as if Geraldine anticipates that Sir Leoline will call his daughter to account the next morning, and is trying to help Christabel cram for the examination by learning the most plausible script for the events of the night.

25. But this is not the only revision of the poem's opening lines that takes place in Part 1. The narrator offers yet another interpretation in the Conclusion:

> It was a lovely sight to see
> The lady Christabel, when she
> Was praying at the old oak tree.
> […] Her slender palms together prest,
> Heaving sometimes on her breast;
> Her face resign'd to bliss or bale—
> Her face, oh call it fair not pale;
> And both blue eyes more bright than clear,
> Each about to have a tear. (267-69, 274-79)

Where Geraldine sought to erase the uncertainties and shock of the pair's first meeting and to elide the difficulties of telling, the first lines of the narrator's version erase Geraldine. That Christabel becomes a "lovely sight" suggests nothing so much as a sentimentalized portrait of conventional feminine piety. But even here, the calm of the scene is troubled by the image of the tears that are about to fall. In a certain sense, they foreshadow everything that is to come or that might come, even though the narrator in the following stanzas jumps from the "lovely sight" of Christabel in the woods to the disturbing image of her asleep in Geraldine's arms—leaving the interactions between the two women in the gap between stanzas until the reader is abruptly returned to the present of the narrator's outrage at "the worker of these harms, / That holds the maiden in her arms" (286-87). Christabel's as-yet-unfallen tears recall the suspended sobs of Hartley Coleridge's glimpse of the moon in "The Nightingale," yet, perpetually about to fall, they also remind us that if we are not yet in the abyss, we may fall over the edge at any moment.

IV.

26. Part 1 of *Christabel* sets in motion a conflict between knowing and telling as a consequence of the suspension of the comparing powers. In Part 2, Christabel internalizes this conflict, which reinforces her inability to "tell." The memory to which Christabel gradually awakens as she watches her father embrace Geraldine is "The vision of fear, the touch and pain!" (441)—not, in a strict sense, a vision at all, for fear, touch, and pain all maintain resistance to representation and communication. The narrator again enforces a distinction between what Christabel knows and what she tells:

> She shrunk and shudder'd, and saw again
> (Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee,
> Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?) (442-44)

While we may be expected to understand that the sense memory of "that bosom old" (445) and "that bosom cold" (446) causes Christabel's first involuntary physical reaction—the "hissing sound" of the following line)—the parenthetical interruption and the stanza break after it visually reinforce the

reader's sense that the poem is reacting increasingly to something other than the events and images portrayed in Part 1. The rules seem to shift here, and we must once again respond by *willing* our suspension of disbelief, even at the risk of being taken in. Then again, it is also possible that the vision Christabel recalls with such terror is the previous night's pedagogical scene.

27. In the absence of speech, the conflict between knowing and telling comes to be played out on Christabel's body as a series of seemingly-disconnected and non-signifying postures. Geraldine

> folded her arms across her chest,
> And couch'd her head upon her breast,
> And look'd askance at Christabel—— (567-59)

The long dash functions as a visual representation of the trajectory of Geraldine's gaze; like a lightning bolt it enters Christabel's body, suspending its vital mental and physical movements. The narrative stumbles under the weight of this gesture. The "look askance" produces, in the following lines, the distortion of Christabel's features. Just as Geraldine's inability to tell the whole truth makes her appear mad or simply dishonest, the distortions of Christabel's body estrange her from the understanding she might otherwise expect from her father:

> [A]ll her features were resign'd
> To this sole image in her mind:
> And passively did imitate
> That look of dull and treacherous hate.
> And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,
> Still picturing that look askance,
> With forc'd unconscious sympathy
> Full before her father's view—
> As far as such a look could be,
> In eyes so innocent and blue! (591-600)

The striking visual interchange between the two women has much more efficacy than the verbal one the night before, at least when it comes to making Christabel do what Geraldine wants. If she cannot force Christabel to recite her lessons, Geraldine has, in a certain sense, done something even more powerful. Christabel emblematizes an intelligence that, to again invoke Ronell's metaphor, has been "body-snatched" by stupidity and made into a zombie—who, nonetheless, passes the test of reproducing Geraldine's hateful look with flying colors.

28. Her facial features contorted into a fun house mirror-image of Geraldine's, Christabel could also be said to resemble "the devotees of the circulating libraries" that Coleridge condemns in a note to chapter 3 of the *Biographia Literaria*, who, for lack of their own mental powers, passively consume the worst of someone else's delusion:

> the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole *materiel* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. (48)

Christabel is an appropriate signifier of neither her own inwardness nor Geraldine's. She becomes instead a subject trembling in a violent oscillation between two conflicting possibilities, unable to give

reliable information about either. It is not the willing suspension of disbelief, since the gaze seems to annihilate whatever was there to be suspended. Even so, this moment should remain, I believe, at least somewhat undecidable, acknowledging the instability of the border between willing and unwilling suspension rather than a definitive transition from one to the other.

29. The undecidability of the status of Christabel's suspension is authorized, I believe, by the poem's emphasis on its transitory nature. The next stanza brings an intermittence to Christabel's "trance" state, allowing her to collect what remains of her "common sense" and "definite purpose" so that she may plead:

> "By my mother's soul do I entreat
> That thou this woman send away!"
> She said; and more she could not say,
> For what she knew, she could not tell,
> O'er-master'd by the mighty spell. (604-8)

It is rather surprising that Christabel can say anything at all by this point, let alone that she can manage to address her father. Christabel's persistent failure to "tell" what she knows again makes it nearly impossible even to ask the question of what "actually" happened or what Christabel "really" knows. The situation may, of course, be evidence of an ongoing obstructionist project on Coleridge's part, just another opportunity for us to be duped in the name of literature. On the other hand, it allows us to pose a different set of questions about knowledge itself, following those that emerge from Sedgwick's reparative positioning: "What does knowledge do—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already has? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?" (124).

30. In the midst of what seems to be a kind of subjective death of the title character, *Christabel* contains the possibility of alternative outcomes. Although the narrator credits the "spell" with the production of Christabel's silence throughout Part 2 of the poem, it is significant that Christabel never actually affirms Geraldine's version of events. It is the narrator who collapses the effects of the spell into Christabel's speechlessness: "I ween, she had no power to tell / Aught else: so mighty was the spell" (461-62). Yet Geraldine told Christabel what to say; she did not prohibit speech entirely. It is easy enough to follow the narrator in dismissing this utterance entirely as something inconsequential, a cliché uttered from weakness of mind. But this is only one of many suppositions on the narrator's part, and it underestimates Christabel's act of resistance and the context of the utterance. Christabel's physical response to the memory of the night before attracts the attention of Sir Leoline who, at least in this moment, responds with fatherly concern: "What ails then my beloved child?" (458). Rather than speaking Geraldine's story, taking the easy way out offered by the inconsequential, limited tale laid out in the "spell," Christabel looks beyond—beyond herself, beyond her text, beyond even the powers of her creator. "All will yet be well!" offers no certainty and, remaining cryptic and unreadable, refuses any immediate consolation that her father might have been willing or able to provide. But it is equally possible to see this line as an expression of hope: not a naïve or stupid hopefulness that denies the centrality of pain and risk, but the hope that Sedgwick describes as a "fracturing, even . . . traumatic thing to experience" that exists "among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates" (146).

31. What we get in Part 2 of *Christabel* is largely fractured and traumatic. The rejection of daughter by father, the abandonment of Christabel in favor of Geraldine, is not only a poignant scene from a Gothic family drama, but also, in a more formal sense, a reminder of what is risked in every experience of mental striving that lets go of its own powers of knowing: a loss of control that is not immediately recuperated in elevation and triumph. It is equally an exploration of the limits of authorial withholding.

The reiterated "rage and pain" (626) and "pain and rage" (628) that attend Sir Leoline's "confusion" (627) and resurface in the poem's penultimate line foreshadow those responses to Christabel by perplexed and frustrated readers. They may find their own "safe place" to have been violated by this poem, which takes them to the edge of the abyss and then halts in "a state of suspended animation" (*Poetry and Prose* 161)— to borrow the term that Coleridge applies to his own poetic powers.

32. Kant tells us that the sublime "reveals in us . . . an ability to judge ourselves independent of nature" and thus "keeps the humanity in our person from being degraded" (120-21). Yet, the problem of "pain and rage" that is brought forward in Part 2 of *Christabel* also reminds us that the sublime arises from the experience of failure. Kant's "safe place" is structured so as to place a limit on such pain, to ensure that it remains only a "mediation" and does not result in the kind of "crushing" experience that Taylor identifies when she writes of Coleridge's attempt to feel "this crushing of a girl child from within as if it were his own" ("Phantom Soul" 722). However, because the sublime cannot take place if we are fully convinced that we are not in imminent danger, the strength of that safe place always remains to be tested. We always run the risk that the safe place will not be safe enough and that we may be crushed—and *Christabel* takes its readers to the very edge of this abyssal possibility. Yet the acceptance of this possibility is for Coleridge the condition of our being able to talk about the sublime, about hope, about suspension. To refuse the risk of the sublime is to refuse all possibility of surprises, good or bad, in favor of a paranoiac position that amounts to a kind of stupid, body-snatched existence—the "dizzy trance" of the induced suspension of common sense rather than the potentially-constitutive willing suspension of disbelief.

V.

33. The possibility of a reparative reading of *Christabel* that allows for willing suspension and poetic faith are suggested in the moments of the text in which we see Christabel at prayer. These have not been extensively studied, but a fairly recent article by J. Robert Barth makes an intriguing case for doing so. Prayers, he writes, "spring from a desire to reach beyond oneself: to love and embrace the other—as Christabel longs for her lover, for her departed mother, even for Geraldine—and ultimately to reach beyond one's own weakness to a transcendent meaning or reality" (81). The impossibility of ever achieving this transcendence, of ever disentangling good and evil, is reflected in a more limited sense by the impossibility of Coleridge finishing *Christabel*. I depart from Barth in his belief that "the underlying current of the poem is love and its movement is unity" (79); at the same time I affirm his view that prayer, even in its seeming impotence, offers a possibility for reading the poem that does not take the "pain and rage" as the necessary conclusion. Granted, in comparison to the Ancient Mariner's spontaneous blessing of the sea creatures, Christabel's prayers seem all but useless. The motif of prayer begins with Christabel's first appearance in the poem: she is the one who "in the midnight wood will pray / For the weal of her lover that's far away" (31-32). And, just before she entreats her father to send Geraldine away, Christabel "Paus'd awhile, and inly pray'd" (602). Swann uses these two images to suggest that the poem has simply returned to its beginning, offering nothing new ("Wandering Mother" 157). Yet, these are not the only two prayers in the poem, and the opening supplication that brings Christabel outside the castle serves as a conventionally-readable sign of piety in a way that the last prayer, which takes place indoors, cannot. Indeed, as we move further along in the poem, Christabel's prayers are often difficult to read—if we notice them at all, for they seem to efface themselves as images in the process of representation.

34. To whom or to what is Christabel praying? What, finally, is she praying for? Are those prayers answered? Though "saints will aid if men will call: / For the blue sky bends over all" (318-19), Christabel's prayers seem to fail spectacularly, at least if we assume that she is praying for immediate protection from Geraldine. Of course, Christabel does not "call" any more than she "tells;" her powers

of invocation are weak, to say the least. Yet, the Apostle Paul writes in the letter to the Romans that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:23). Prayer may seem to achieve the most when the animating intention of the supplicant is least articulated, and in some ways it functions as the speech act *par excellence* of a figure like Christabel. The emphasis on silent prayer works to contain the poem's language and to suspend the consequences of words that will always be spoken too soon. Given the failures that attend Christabel's reiterated supplications, we are also continually reminded of the impossibility of prayer—even as this impossibility provides the grounds of an absolute faith. Just as Kant's sublime originates in the displeasure that comes from feeling our own inadequacies, recent phenomenological work on prayer has identified what Michael Andrews calls "the economy of violence that underlies every act of prayer *qua* act of consciousness" (196). "To pray," Andrews writes, "means always to pray to God, to pray with the passion of the infinite, to pray for the possibility of givenness *without condition*, to pray for the impossible" (196). It is through prayer, moreover, that Coleridge stages the sublime as a matter of poetic faith, a leap into the abyss regardless of danger and against all certainty. To show clear answers to Christabel's prayers would bring them back into circulation within a restricted economy of representation that prayer itself does not allow. Indeed, any kind of conventional "ending" to the poem would render the suspension of disbelief—and, thus, faith itself—unnecessary, reducing it to a matter of the chattering questions with which the poem began. However, since the narrative is suspended rather than ended, these prayers cannot be determined as unanswered, either—this, too, would be an inadequate, not to mention emotionally and theologically intolerable, ending that forecloses any possibility of hope and denies the potentially performative force of Christabel's attempt at benediction, "All will yet be well!"

35. Had Coleridge taken *Christabel* to a less ambiguous conclusion such as the one envisioned in the plan he related to James Gillman, then it would perhaps be justifiable to classify the poem as a Gothic text made legible by the Gothic's generic code. However, Coleridge left *Christabel* in that state of "suspended animation" by asserting and reasserting an intention to "finish" the poem throughout the rest of his life—intentions that he never expressed, for example, in regard to other "fragments" such as "Kubla Khan." Regardless of whether Coleridge actually intended to "finish" *Christabel*—or whether such a completion was even within his power[7]—his insistence in the preface and elsewhere on his intention to finish the poem raises the possibility that he has indeed disseminated less than he has created.[8] Anyone else who attempts to say anything about the poem in the interval runs the risk of looking stupid at some future time when the author reveals the fullness of his plan.[9]

36. Coleridge's conception of willing suspension and poetic faith is central to his ability to affirm the sublime as it operates in *Christabel*. More importantly, though, by stopping on the threshold of a fully-realized sublime experience, *Christabel* goes as far as it can to guard the possibility of the sublime as a wholly spontaneous event, even if some experiences, particularly in the natural world, seem better-positioned to trigger it. The sublime is a test of faith precisely because it is likely not to take place, at least not according to our schedule or expectations. It may take us by surprise or it may disappoint us. Willing suspension goes beyond simply the holding back of our disbelief under the influence of supernatural illusion. Instead, the text holds the possibility of the sublime while giving itself over to the potential for being misread, sharing the risk of stupidity with its readers. In *Christabel*, Coleridge attempts to maintain the sublime in its contradictions and to apprehend it without representing it—in short, to speak what it "cannot tell," respecting the unknown as unknown.

37. To experience the sublime, we must be convinced that we are safe and yet be able to forget that knowledge at the moment it becomes most important. Thus, although the willing suspension of disbelief, particularly in its popular usage, may certainly denote an experience of pleasurable abandonment to an artistic illusion, it cannot be understood simply in terms of escapism or entertainment. Only a willing suspension—a deliberate giving over of the self and of cognition, a

decision taken at the moment when we could still choose to do otherwise—can cultivate the mental attunement that allows the subject to both know and not know that he is safe. Both the dynamical sublime and Coleridge's poetic faith make use of an imagined experience to produce genuine affect; at the same time, of course, the failure of imagination remains internal to the experience itself. The call for poetic faith and the suspension of disbelief functions as a reminder that the sublime must remain heterogeneous to all systems of regularity and representation, that it is never guaranteed to take place, and that it is essentially spontaneous and surprising.

38. The sublime, as it is staged in and through *Christabel*, exceeds all boundaries and reveals itself only as impossibility—the perpetual suspension, the deferral of certainty on which all other feelings and conclusions are based. It resists the domestication necessary fully to secure a place of safety and leaves its subject open instead to experiences that come much closer to trauma than Kant allows. *Christabel* thus functions as a complementary, if seemingly oppositional, narrative to the Kantian sublime, and as a site where Coleridge questions certain foundations of his spiritual and philosophical projects. He faces the darkest of his very real spiritual doubts—including the possibility that his efforts are in vain, and that the sublime experience can provide at best an unstable foundation for religious belief—and these are no small matters for him in 1816. If *Christabel* continues to unsettle and disturb its readers—and, indeed, occasionally to make us feel stupid—that power comes not from any strictly psychological or thematic concerns, but from the refusal to rest on the guarantees of reason and the supersensible against the abyss at its center and its willingness to attempt to speak—even momentarily—from a place of vertigo and danger rather than of safety and elevation.

39. In a way, then, Hazlitt was right all along to have described the feeling of reading *Christabel* in terms of suspension and even imbecility. The pedagogy of the sublime dictates that what is worth teaching is that which is beyond teaching. Such teaching must necessarily comprehend an experience of stupidity, one that goes beyond confusion and ignorance or even the knowledge of what we do not know. We must learn our own smallness in the face of absolute magnitude, our own vulnerability to overwhelming force, our own inability to "tell." And then, somehow, we must also live through that revelation and survive our smallness, emerging transformed and expanded in ways that still remain somewhat beyond our powers to tell.

Notes

1 Collingwood 1:234.

The author wishes to thank Sundeep Bisla, J. Jennifer Jones, Alan Vardy, and Nancy Yousef for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

2 The line numbers of all poems are quoted from *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano.

3 See Taylor, "Phantom Soul," 714; Favret 113; and Minot and Minot 34.

4 The *OED* entry for "suspension" lists "willing suspension of disbelief" as a discrete usage, with credit for its invention given to Coleridge. The meaning of the phrase is defined as "the voluntary withholding of skepticism on the part of the reader with regard to incredible characters and events."

5 Judith Halberstam characterizes the Gothic as "the crisis occasioned by the inability to 'tell,' meaning both the inability to narrate and the inability to categorize" (23). The proliferation of Gothic elements in *Christabel* has been the subject of a number of critical discussions. For recent considerations of *Christabel* and the Gothic, see Leslie Ann Minot, and Walter Minot and Jerrod Hogel.

6 During a hearing on the Iraq war before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in September 2007, then-Senator Hilary Clinton questioned the integrity of General David Petraeus's testimony, remarking, "I think that the reports that you provide to us require a willing suspension of disbelief." John McCain's comment the next day that "It's a willing suspension of disbelief that Senator Clinton thinks she knows more than General Petraeus" distended the phrase to the point of incoherence.

7 Many attempts to account for Coleridge's failure to complete the poem look to structural and thematic difficulties that may have exacerbated his tendency towards procrastination. Walter Jackson Bate, among the first modern scholars to look beyond "bad luck and personal problems" as the impediments to the completion of *Christabel*, argues that "There was really nothing to prevent him during these three years (not to mention the next fifteen) from finishing the poem—except the nature of the poem itself" (74). John Beer, on the other hand, remains confident that a definitive ending to the poem could be imagined, yet admits that this is easier said than done in a "context which demanded that *Christabel* should remain 'innocent' in a very literal sense" (82). More recently, Susan Eilenberg has placed Christabel in the context of a structure of "dispossession" in Coleridge's collaboration with Wordsworth: just as *Christabel* falls victim to Geraldine's stronger influence, Coleridge gives way to what he perceives as Wordsworth's superior poetic powers (99-100).

8 An immediate motivation for Coleridge's gesture could very well be his sense that the unpublished manuscript of *Christabel* had been somewhat over-disseminated (or given over to misreading) in advance; chapter 24 of the *Biographia Literaria* describes it as having been "almost as well known among literary men as if it had been on common sale, the same references were made to it, and the same liberties taken with it, even to the names of the imaginary persons in the poem" (2.238).

9 My understanding of the implications of Coleridge's insistence on the partial (as opposed to fragmentary) quality of *Christabel* is indebted to Sundeep Bisla's discussion of mystery writing and copyright in the mid-Victorian period. Bisla's study of British copyright law holds that the emergence of the mystery novel genre was a direct response to the contradictory legal position of British authors, marking "the general writer's split desire to keep alive that metaphysical right of creation . . . and to, at the same time, establish that desired post publication identity as 'author'" (194). Coleridge's relationship to *Christabel*, in particular his concern with keeping a certain control over the text even as he allows it to be commercially disseminated, seems, in a number of ways, to anticipate what Bisla calls "authorship's antagonistic relationship with publication" (221).

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The Sublime and Education

Educational Rationalization / Sublime Reason

Frances Ferguson, Johns Hopkins University

1. “Sublimity” and “education”—the words seem almost to define one another by their contrast. All that is “sublime” traffics in the unrestrained; all that is educational involves confinement—both physically, in spaces created for the pupil, and mentally, in intellectual spaces laid out for her by another. And both terms figure so insistently in the writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that they can seem to represent in and of themselves a process of ongoing differentiation in popular consciousness, with freedom appearing on the side of sublimity and regimentation on the side of education, and the two increasingly far removed from one another. Such alignments seem plausible because both sublimity and education represent distinctive and frequently opposed ways of conflating facts with values.

2. As the language of judgment becomes ever more diffused and expansive in the eighteenth century, discussions of sublimity and education assume prominent roles. They are vehicles for the notion that reports of perceptions are themselves insufficient; they must be shown as part of an evaluative array. We see this in the most basic gestures of Romantic poetry. Thus, Wordsworth introduces the Leech-gatherer not as an old man but as someone who seems “the oldest man . . . that ever wore grey hairs.” What might be the barest observational statement is promoted into a two-pronged claim—that this particular old man is strikingly and unusually old, and that the poet, that “traveller on the moor,” would not have been arrested in his progress if the old man had not been conspicuously and distinctively old. Such descriptions of perceptions are more than merely descriptive; they already carry the privilege of what is judged noteworthy, and gesture towards the undescribed elements against which they are implicitly compared.

3. But if aesthetic discussions highlight and diffuse such comparative gestures through the most factual accounts, the educational writing that flourishes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is itself a schooling in arts of evaluation that are simultaneously directed at the knowledge of academic subjects and the persons who are collected for its production. Pupils, in being awarded constant companions like the tutor in Rousseau's *Emile* or in assuming a place in one of the monitorial classrooms of Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell or the projected Chrestomathic school of Jeremy Bentham, do not merely become auditors and observers. They also become part of the circuit of evaluation. Jane and John both demonstrate what they know about spelling or addition; and they also become objects of comparative knowledge themselves, as they and others can see and know that Jane knows more than John (or vice versa). In the process, they help us to see the importance of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of “a degree of rationalization of what [a communication] transmits.”[1] In his account, this communicative rationalization disambiguates various behaviors that might look similar or identical to an outside observer and that are not, indeed, always readily explicable by the persons who perform them. (A gift, as he observes, might look like an exchange; but the giver of a gift operates with different notions of timing than does the participant in a simple trade. A gift reciprocated too soon or too late is a gift wasted.)[2]

4. We might well, on another occasion, want to question the extent to which Bourdieu's notion of practical competence—the knowingness of knowing-how—is nearly so fundamentally at odds with Kant and Kant's emphasis on distinctive mental faculties as Bourdieu suggests. For the moment, however, I mean to invoke Bourdieu simply to call attention to a fundamental insight that impels both the anthropological (and generally social scientific) writing and the educational writing of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: that what is communicated in social communication is not merely

concrete knowledge (of, say, geometry or grammar) but social concepts, a degree of rationalization. Bourdieu, in *Distinction*, chalks the work of such social concepts up to what he sees as absolutely fundamental—the traffic in distinctions among persons. But educational writing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries must engage with an obvious distinction of a different sort—that between the (adult) educator and the (child) pupil. And the intensifying awareness of the differences between them —the rationalization that stresses their separability from one another—pushes education increasingly into the realm of critique and method in the search for a common ground that would overcome that basic difference and demonstrate intergenerational education to be possible.

5. Many accounts of childhood education trace out a progress from stern repression to enlightened indulgence, but in doing so they mischaracterize the phenomenon they describe. That is, they fail to account for the power that children—and especially children collected into groups—come to seem to possess. While they might not know all that their elders might hope to transmit to them, they seemed also to demand a continual review of the worth of that earlier learning and to insist that knowledge speak a new vernacular. For the kind of education that had been rising in importance and influence at least since Locke's *Thoughts on Education* was progressive. It presented itself as a staged progress for the individual but also for knowledge in general. It continually limned education as an initiation into the process of extending knowledge past what it had been; and, in the process, it created generations as forceful entities that would not so much carry the knowledge of their predecessors but would render it obsolete.

6. Educational writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Jeremy Bentham depict the importance of time to the acquisition of knowledge itself, and in the process make knowledge look as though it must always be deliberately adjusted to what a pupil can know at a certain stage of development. They expand upon Rousseau's insistence upon the time-value of learning by developing, in Barbauld's case, concepts of the variable nature of the child's capacities and, in Bentham's, a technique for collecting children of similar ages into groups or classes which then become a venue for evaluating the social value of knowledge.[3]

7. Moreover, while most follow Locke in recommending praise and blame as incentives that adults can offer children, something has happened to the very notion of incentives by the late eighteenth century. Adults may want to reinforce their approval of the correctness of an answer, may want to crown it with a reward. But because these educational schemes are so alert to the variability of the value of both a reward and a deserving answer, progressive education becomes an exercise in continually readjusted values. Thus, one of the most remarkable features of the educational programs I shall be considering is their tendency to say rather little about their own content as such. Thus, educational accomplishment may be channeled into a relatively routine progress (from, say, the learning of letters and numbers to the learning of reading and arithmetic), and each stage may arrange its learners in the ascending file that produces the “head of the class” as the most advanced. But these practical distinctions are continually being rendered obsolete—sometimes even by the next day's new set of discriminations. Their very efficacy in giving a concrete shape to particular rationalizations thus starts yielding a position that is more committed to the notion of progress itself than to the specific products of it. Reason, in other words, usurps the attention that specific rationalizations—particular applications of reason—might occupy.

8. Necessarians like Joseph Priestley emphasize the ongoing demonstration of the regularity of human choices, and he assimilates the very preferability of one series of choices over others to an idea of progress or perfection (in which he sees nature to have been created whole and entire, so that one makes progress by explicating otherwise indiscernible differences). Priestley explicitly connects what we might think of as purely scientific and educational progress with the sublime. In *History of Electricity*, he thus describes how the progressive understanding of phenomena like electricity

inevitably lead us to the notion of the sublime: “one cannot help forming an idea of an unlimited increase in futurity, which is a prospect really boundless, and sublime.”[4] Thus, the notion that education develops rational capacities by producing a constant series of demonstrations that enact rationalizing activities becomes identical with sublimity, in the form of unbounded practical possibility.

9. As inspiring as Priestley's account of scientific and educational progress may be, it is precisely such a line of argument that prompted Kant to adopt a completely different account of both education and sublimity.[5] Moral reason, which Kant treats as full-fledged from early childhood and adequate to the tasks it must confront, becomes both anchor and engine for educational improvement, the working definition of the capacity to tell the better from the worse and to choose the better. While Priestley imagines science as a collective and progressive enterprise of unfolding demonstration, Kant sees moral reasoning as setting a limit to the usefulness of such demonstration. Moral thought for him is sublime precisely because it stands in need of no further explication or demonstration. And thus he arrives at the famous Kantian remark that has too often seemed merely lyrical: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*” (*CPrR* 5:162, p. 269).

10. Rousseau's *Emile* seemed to most educational writers (including Barbauld, Thomas Day, and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth) to enjoin practical education and an emphasis on education as a series of experiments and actions, and thus verged on a nearly purely externalist description of education, with the observation of children themselves rounding out the empirical picture. Against such an empiricist line of thought, Kant has been widely credited with giving an internalist account of aesthetic experience and in arguing that aesthetic judgment tells us more about the capacity for taking an interest in beauty and sublimity than about the actual objects on which such judgment works. Yet the depth of the connection between his account of aesthetic judgment—particularly that of sublimity—and his treatment of education has received scant attention. In the discussion that follows, I shall trace out Barbauld's attempt to locate education in experience and her insight into the difficulties created by judgment itself and Bentham's effort to minimize metaphysical claims in an effort to make social value visible (and to dissipate a variety of moral judgments in the process). Perhaps it is only by seeing the full ingenuity of their efforts to ground education in actuality that we can appreciate Kant's reversal—or wholesale modification—of their thinking. Kant treats practical reason as the basis of education—not because education should retail moral maxims but rather because moral judgment is for him the capacity to cultivate a knowledge that he depicts as untaught. In *Emile* Rousseau had spoken of outrage at injustice as a moral (and implicitly political) reaction that even an infant might experience; in Kant's writings on practical reason and on education, the capacity to recognize justice occupies a position at least as fundamental and almost as early in its appearance.

* * *

11. The notions of sublimity and education developed a particularly strained relationship in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), with secure educational advancement appearing in the role of antagonist to the novelty and awe connected with the sublime. First, Burke depicted the experience of sublimity as the kind of incontestable contact with greatness that deserves a place in every curriculum, and then he jeopardized the transmissibility of testimony about sublime experience by raising questions about the reliability and availability of an individual's experience—even, or especially, to himself. It is easy to see how this account of the sublime would have run afoul of the notion of education, because education is always engaged in a project of transmission; the autodidact, who appears to operate in seclusion, becomes recognizable as having taught himself only in so far as he arrives at knowledge that intersects with what other people have learned through their experience and their more public acts of reading and writing.

12. Educational communicability—whether leading individuals to knowledge or drawing knowledge from them—was frustrated by the worry that Burke laid out in the *Enquiry* that individuals would not continue to be moved by their own experiences. For the inability to continue to feel the values that had once seemed so indubitable in experiences of the sublime amounted to the loss of those values for the individual. “What everyone knows” faded into “what I once knew but what others now know for me.” [6] Despite everything Burke had done to affirm that one recognizes one's own experience unequivocally, he came to treat the strongly definitive character of sublime and beautiful experience as if it were a version of Robinson Crusoe's gold—useless to someone on the desert island of an experience that could no longer be felt but only remembered. One might, he thought, tire of one's experience and, in that sense, become over-educated—not just too well-rehearsed in experiences to do a job that called for only modest skills but so over-experienced as no longer to feel responsive to experience at all. This was the young Burke's version of the kind of skepticism that Kant detected in Humean empiricism (and, indeed, in all forms of empiricism). Boredom. The inability to attend any longer because one feels that one has already encountered all the experiences on offer, and no longer has the reactions that could be taken as reliable measures of objects of experience.

13. In sorting experiences into those of the sublime and the beautiful, Burke had acknowledged the importance of value. The notions of the sublime and beautiful allowed him not just to talk about experiences as perceptual facts but also to include evaluation in that process. To say that honey was sweet and aloes bitter was for him to find general categories in which to classify them in evaluative groupings. Yet the happy convergence of the two—the sense that experiences and evaluations of them were simultaneous and united—ended in the moment that experience came to seem equivocal or stale. One point of the desire to classify objects as sublime and beautiful was scientific—knowing where to turn for an experience of the sublime, say, because one had identified particular objects as reliably producing sublime experiences. From this standpoint, a perception of the sublime was supposed both to be an experience and an incentive for other experiences of sublimity. But Burke's sense of the staling of experience ruptured its self-reinforcing quality. Other motives came to be necessary, and so society—along with God's providential interest in the perpetuation of the human race and in the contribution that individual ambition makes to the common good—came to stand as the justification for the experiences that we no longer have but remember having had in the sweet spot of our lives when our senses had appeared to judge the world aright. In his own version of the argument from design, Burke thus undermines the notion of a progressive education by transferring the benefits of learned experience from individuals to societal interests. Experiences, that is, recruit individuals for societal aims, and the individuals who lose intense feeling then become vehicles for interests that seem personally remote but conceptually available—the providentially arranged society.

14. While Burke presented experience as a process of continual sorting into the types of sublimity and beauty, his ideal experiential subject appeared to be a man recently arrived at maturity, someone old enough to know how to register his experiences and young enough not to be jaded. Thus, he described a temporal arc from “the morning of our days,” but showed no interest in the idea of accommodating experience to people at different phases of their lives. And it was that aspect of the project of education—the delivery of experience in units that were age-appropriate—that assumed centrality in the educational writings that were ever more frequently written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Emile*, published in 1762 shortly after Burke's *Enquiry* of 1757, Rousseau would try to harness the experience of a child to a carefully staged progress, and to make education a process of moving from the most obviously sensory experiences (such as the heat of a stove and the burn it causes) to social concepts (such as the idea of property). Experience, on Rousseau's account, can teach that property must be an implicit agreement that each will not undo another's work—with the concept functioning as a kind of invisible fence that prevents redundant labor that would put (one person's) labor into conflict (with another's), and keeps many persons from digging and planting the same ground that they would if each worked earnestly and in ignorance of the others' work. What Rousseau depicts

is less a war of each against each, or all against all, than a recognition of the importance of a concept in holding the place of otherwise invisible work.

15. Burke foregrounded individual experience and then made it supremely dispensable, but Rousseau's *Emile* obviated that problem by depicting education as a progressive compact between an individual and the objects of experience. Burke had collected instances of beautiful and sublime experience to create a coding, a language of evaluation, that was said to continue to exist without benefit of actual experience when one came to talk of the divine motives that operated to make the sublime and beautiful permanent representatives of society's needs for personal ambition and the continuation of the human race. By contrast, Rousseau's pedagogy—even more than Locke's before it—insists that the only justification for education is that a child might ratify the world that he encounters—that "why" should always involve an indubitable experience (that a hot stove will burn the touch) or a plausible inference (that the idea of property does not simply by definition assign land or objects as "meum" and "tuum" but that it involves a respect for the frequently invisible labor that someone puts into that land or object—and the desire not to waste everyone's labor by having them all apply it to the same land or object). Better to retreat from society than to risk the Burkean outcome, transferring one's perceptions and rationalizations to others.

16. First, the Rousseauvian scheme had represented the education that an individual receives from nature as the most authoritative and indubitable (and had thus minimized the extent to which this natural education was already social, with the tutor always at Emile's side to draw out the moral of every encounter). Second, Rousseau had suggested that concepts like that of property could readily be derived from nature—that one could, in any given moment, produce a practical demonstration of the inevitability that persons would reason their way to the notion of property—as a logical rather than arbitrarily social one. Rousseau's scheme not only foregrounded the possibility of confidence in one's own intuitions and reasonings. It also suggested an ordering that would dole out child-sized portions of experience and conceptualization, and fit education less to a particular child than to a child of a particular age and degree of development.

17. Rousseau's educational theory seemed to Anna Laetitia Barbauld, the most gifted English adapter of his work, to offer a particularly happy way of resolving disagreements about the world and its ultimate purposes. She took the lesson of Rousseau's criticism of reading Aesop's fables to children (in which he maintained that a child would hear the story of the fox and the crow and would think less about what's involved in being tricked by a sly antagonist and more about getting the cheese that figures in the story) and imagined that the project of education must honor two aims: that of appealing, as Rousseau did, to the immediate world of a child's experience and that of adjusting adult speech to that of a child. Thus, while Rousseau had described the miscommunications that resulted from the fact of difference between adults and children, Barbauld set out to create a series of age-graded readers—*Lessons for Children of Two to Three Years Old* (1778) through *Lessons For Children* (Part 4, 1788).[7]

18. As many have observed, children's books are only indirectly for children.[8] They must make their appeal at least as much to the adults who read with the children as to the children themselves. But Barbauld's age-graded books aimed less to make the parent or teacher the spokesperson for advantageous and superior knowledge than to provide a kind of script for an adult so as to make the adult, merely by reading these books as they were written and printed, speak the language that a child might. Her primers appear at least as much as trots for adults to use in their interactions with children as expressions of adult authority. Even before a child was expected to read the books for herself, their pages were designed for young eyes. They had generous margins, abundant leading, and large type; each book in the series was short but longer than the previous one, out of consideration of a child's short but lengthening attention span. Moreover, the books erased the boundary dividing the book and the world of the actual child for whom Barbauld was writing, her adoptive son (and biological nephew)

Charles. The deictics of the texts—the references to “this” and “that”—coordinated exactly with those of this child's actual world; and the textual references to the cat and the sewing kit were confirmed (for Charles and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, at least) in references to the cat and the sewing kit with which they had direct acquaintance.

19. While Thomas Day, another of the English Rousseauveans, put a distinctly Christian spin on the aim to direct writing and thinking to children by quoting Jesus's injunction to “suffer the little children to come unto me,” Barbauld's writing, by contrast, avoided such appeals to the authority of scripture, or revealed religion. Rather, by engaging an author like herself in appealing to the thought processes and attention span of a child, Barbauld attempted to deliver on two projects at once. She hoped to create texts that would, by virtue of their continual reference to an actual world, put the child and the adult on the same page in relation to the world. And she also aimed to move the child slowly and steadily toward recognition of the ways in which the beauties and terrors of the actual world were a manifestation of the greatness and goodness of the god who had authored it. As Anne Janowitz has noted, Barbauld's *Hymns in Prose for the Use of Children* (1781) inspired great praise for what M.H. Abrams would call its natural supernaturalism, the interfusion of naturalistic descriptions with religious sentiment, in which one felt one's way to God.[9]

20. The actual world, that is, need not be expurgated for children; it might be depicted in all its appealing and terrifying aspects, and might thus provide the kind of education that Wordsworth described himself as having received when he was “fostered alike by beauty and by fear.”[10] A difficulty appeared, however, when Barbauld converted opposed aspects of divine providence into equivalents: the beautiful might be obviously good, but the terrifying was also good, because purposeful, from the perspective of the deity. With the movement from the individual perspective of the human child to the providential revaluation of terror, Barbauld raised the same sorts of problems of freedom and determinism that Burke had. While Burke had temporarily disguised these issues by introducing the question of growing insensibility and boredom, both he and Barbauld relied on intuition of the natural world to suggest that individuals were equipped to understand and evaluate the world aright and then to undercut that confidence as the providential perspective trumped individual intuitions and appraisals.

21. Barbauld's appeal to providential judgment cast doubt on human perceptions and decisions, rendering them insubstantial stop-gaps that were always in danger of being overruled, but her position also had the effect of delegitimizing the coercive authority of parents and teachers. Pressing the implications of the argument from design, she raised the possibility that parents and tutors would not need to anticipate and enforce societal judgments. The punitive face of education might disappear, for any correction that a child needed would be provided by the judgments of society and, ultimately, of providence.

22. Barbauld's very tolerance, however, emptied the notions of social agreement and social judgment of any content. Whereas Rousseau had imagined that there might be social concepts—such as that of property—that could derive their warrant simply from a logic of human interaction, Barbauld's attempt to unite the natural with the divine created as many problems as it was designed to resolve. On the most basic level the argument from design—the view that God infuses all natural objects with spirit and that the world is a continuing testimony to his existence—offered a deterministic view. Despite its general air of benignity, its very inclusiveness exacerbated its deterministic tendencies: all religions were essentially one religion; all tendencies had the same destination. Thus, apparent ecumenicism might counsel tolerance, but it was a comparatively empty tolerance that generalized the possibility of everyone's being proved wrong by providence in the end and that never really had to face what John Rawls has called the fundamental fact of disagreement about comprehensive doctrines in modern societies.[11] Barbauld's relation to this problem is a particularly interesting one both because she was a prolific and thoughtful writer who took Rousseauvean educational theory quite seriously, and because she herself, as a Dissenter, repudiated the coerciveness of state religion. Indeed, at Warrington

Academy, she was a close friend of Joseph Priestley, whom Kant praised for having the insight and candor to acknowledge the absurdity of repentance for an action that one has committed when one is, as Priestley was, "a genuine *fatalist* proceeding consistently" (*CPrR* 5:98, p. 219). Pantheism, Kant insisted, left no room for significant regret on the part of human agents, because their actions were only to be understood as permitted by an omniscient and omnipresent deity who ordered all things "for the best in the best of all possible worlds," as Voltaire's Pangloss would put the Leibnizian formula.

23. Yet while a writer like Barbauld attempted to use the actual world as a common resource to persons of many ages and many creeds, she achieved her inclusiveness by casting judgment as deferred and delegated. In challenging the authority of families, their associates, their sects, and their nations in interpreting the message of a providentially arranged natural world, she moved past the Burkean appeal to a providential investment in social aims and insisted that even the judgments of societies are open to correction. In her essay "On Education" (1773), Barbauld first imagined the family itself as a mediator between the child and the world and spoke of the importance of the example that parents set. Thus, in response to a request from a friend with a substantial fortune, she offered her advice on the education of his son. Although the friend had been studying books of education ("from Xenophon to Locke, and from Locke to Catherine Macaulay"), Barbauld urged him and his wife to attend principally to "the education of circumstances—insensible education—which, like insensible perspiration, is of more constant and powerful effect, and of infinitely more consequence to the habit, than that which is direct and apparent" ("On Education" 2). Their example, she insisted, would educate their child, and "it is not in your power to withdraw him from the continual influence of these things, except you were to withdraw yourself also" ("On Education" 2).

24. One might anticipate that Barbauld's line of argument might have ended in a statement of cross-generational cultural solidarity (of the kind that Burke so passionately espoused in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*), but she instead pursued a very different route. She describes a child as a symptom of the changes that have occurred in the history of a family. While "poverty educated" her friend; "wealth will educate" his child ("On Education" 3). Barbauld draws a vivid contrast between the neglect that the father experienced in childhood and the attentiveness that he and his wife manifest toward their son: "Your life was of very little consequence to any one; even your parents, encumbered with a numerous family, had little time to indulge the softnesses of affection, or the solicitude of anxiety" but "it is not possible for you, it would not even be right for you, in your present situation, to pay no more attention to your child than was paid to you" ("On Education" 3).

25. One cannot educate one's children as one was educated oneself, Barbauld thinks, because the difference in understandings that Rousseau describes is itself not merely the product of differences in age but also of a difference in circumstances. Thus, while she counsels parents to educate their children by their examples and repudiates "any plan of factitious education which you could provide for them" ("On Education" 9-10), she both encourages them to think about those circumstances—an awareness, in the first instance, of the effect of money and social position—and also urges that parents temper their desires to correct their children's faults (however right it may be to perceive them). Providence, she says, "continues his education upon a larger scale, and by a process which includes means far more efficacious" than those available to the parents who are the chief educators in the family home ("On Education" 10). Urging parents to spare both the rod and the sermon, Barbauld imagines that larger social circumstances—those of the individual and of nations themselves—will eventually produce their own correction. In imagining that circumstances will cure any flaws of character or mind that a young person has on leaving the family home, Barbauld is not, however, simply stressing the importance of attention to society. Rather, she is imagining both that society speaks more powerfully to individual characters than any other individuals can and also that the judgments of societies are themselves limited. "States," she writes, "are educated as individuals—by circumstances" ("On Education" 11). While "vices will certainly follow certain states of poverty or riches, ignorance or high civilization,"

they will be corrected by a Providence that awards its judgments in the form of "an unsuccessful war, a loss of trade, or any of those great calamities by which it pleases Providence to speak to a nation, in such language as *will* be heard" ("On Education" 11).

26. In commending tolerance even of a child's bad behavior, Barbauld does not mean to suggest that a child will amend such behavior herself but rather to insist that judgment will inevitably come. And she does so out of a sense that society, in the first instance, and providence, in the last, provide judgments on an individual's actions. While social circumstance may change "the giddy youth . . . into the wise counsellor" and "the thoughtless, gay girl, into the sober wife" ("On Education" 14), Barbauld's providentialism suspends the urgency even of societal judgments by suggesting an ever-unfolding series of courts of appeal that ends in divine providence. Parents need not assess their children's every action, need not hover over their every word and deed, because, Barbauld thinks, they can rest assured that vices will be corrected, if only in the indeterminate and unforeseeable future.

27. Barbauld's depiction of the workings of providence in the individual life and in national history might seem to assimilate her to an educational tradition that has been described more often than it has, I think, existed. That tradition is depicted as, ultimately, an education essentially confined to what Kant terms "discipline," the capacity to sit still and pay attention, to accept the rules of the societal game. I think, to the contrary, that Barbauld had better reasons for her educational theory than we can fathom by accepting Charles Lamb's attacks on Barbauld's desire not to recount fairy tales and court the world of fantasy but instead to focus on an actual world and by putting her on the side of an authoritarian crackdown on the liberty of children's imaginations. For, as I have been suggesting, one major achievement of her age-graded readers was continually to point to a shared world, what Wordsworth would call "the world that is the world of all of us." Yet even as Barbauld was substantially more indulgent in describing relations among persons—including parents and teachers, on the one hand, and children, on the other—her providential reading of historical potentialities undercut her aim to link adults and children, teachers and taught, by constantly referring to the world that they all occupied. She had rejected fairy tales because they did not, she thought, support the kinds of sharable and shared experiences that would enable both religion and everyday life to be rational. By appealing to an imaginative world in which objects, experiences, and outcomes could all be pulled from the magician's hat of fantasy, fairy tales introduced a kind of privilege analogous to that which Hume had found in miracles. In the fairy tale, such privilege was, to lay out Barbauld's line of thinking in terms that she does not herself use, bound up in the fantasist's claim to be able to see past the limits of sense.

28. Yet her insistence upon providential correction itself ultimately repeated the abandonment of the very actuality that she tried to embrace. The constant appeal to the world seemed at first to suggest that the natural and the supernatural worlds were in perfect alignment, that one's experience of the natural world was one and the same with rational religion. Staging experience correctly—without moving too quickly to play the religious trump card—ought to make it possible for individuals to develop their characters virtuously because rationally. But at the same time the invocation of a system of judgments —even as they were said to show the continuing interchange between the actual world and the supersensible world—revealed the limitations in one's perceptions and evaluations of objects and events in the present. The prospect of future corrections that was supposed to obviate the need for stern castigations in the present made the future look like nothing so much as a potentially relentless erosion of present judgments. The claim on behalf of the goodness and greatness of the world looked as though it demanded a providential system of rewards and punishments to explain why different interpretations of the shared world persisted and to adjust for the difficulties that reason had in reading the world aright.

29. Education thus presented for Barbauld (as for her friend Priestley) the same sort of problems that sublimity had for Burke: the ultimate content of the education—the belief that a benevolent deity had

arranged the world for the best—compromised the notion of individual freedom. Under the influence of the Rousseauvian maxim that all will be lost if a child is forced to make choices and act before she understands what she's being asked to choose, writers stressed the importance of free and conscientious deliberation. Under the influence of the notion of design, such deliberation could look like the active pursuit of the inevitable. Rousseau had made the process of education appear as an on-going experiment (and experimental science had become an important element of the educational plans of Priestley, William Godwin, Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and others). Providentialism, in the form of the claim that there is a design that is only intermittently discernible to persons, might ultimately result in making all experimental engagements with the natural world reduce scientific discovery to an uncovering of the destiny of particular individuals who had been chosen for knowledge.

30. Thus, even though rational Dissenters like Priestley and Barbauld stoutly defended political and religious freedom, the values that individuals expressed and affirmed in the choices they made looked, from the standpoint of natural religion, like very flimsy decisions. The problem was not simply that agents might make decisions that they would later regret. Those regrettable decisions ceased to appear to be decisions at all as they became a kind of compost for the ultimate happiness of the universe. Thus, the authority of even a beneficent deity compromised the freedom and tolerance that such committedly progressive figures as Priestley and Barbauld had to offer, and the greatest happiness of the universe overrode individual freedom. The decisions that one made, that is, never really could achieve the status of independent actions. They were, instead, merely gestures that assisted other, more remote actions. And the authority of even a beneficent teacher could thus seem like an assertion of coercive power. Individual action looked as though it was always in danger of being sacrificed on the altar of the universal and eternal view.

31. Some version of the criticism I have just made applies as well to utilitarianism in most standard accounts (even as they are given by utilitarians). And this should not be surprising, because Jeremy Bentham, generally seen as the initiator of modern utilitarian thought, corresponded regularly with Priestley and claimed to have drawn his notion of the “greatest happiness for the greatest number” from Hume and Priestley. Moreover, reading J.J.C. Smart's defense of utilitarianism alongside Bernard Williams's assault on it makes it easy to see the affinities between the religious and the atheistic versions.[12] For the garden-variety accounts of utilitarianism and pantheistic necessity suffer from the fact that they feel obliged to make individuals equipped with calculative reason take on board too much, to imagine scenarios in which they might face the possibility of rescuing one person or ten, saving the writer and educator Fenelon or his servant (in William Godwin's example), deciding for a more diffusive influence and against a less diffusive one. That is, the examples all build in an open-endedness that warps the description of the choices to be contemplated, because the examples revolve around a series of conjectures about the future that only have provisional stopping points, since the greatest good of the greatest number is always at risk of being replaced with another account of the quantity of good and a larger number of persons who benefit from it. This unsteady relation between an action in prospect and an action in outcome jeopardizes the individual perspective for both pantheistic providentialism and utilitarianism alike. Utilitarianism, as Smart describes it, closely approximates the simple notion of choosing the better as opposed to the worse and representing it in loosely comparative terms (even Kant, for Smart, sometimes seems to qualify as a utilitarian). In this form, it is not descriptive enough to be of any real help.

32. Indeed, utilitarianism as Smart presents it is so thoroughly committed to a comparative assessment of externalized positive and negative incentives—for the individual decision-maker and for this decision-maker as someone who works on behalf of humanity at large—that two problems arise. First, it is hard to visualize many decisions that could plausibly be called moral or even political that can be easily quantified by ordinary individuals—that is, by anyone other than the officials who practice what

Williams calls “Government House utilitarianism” and who claim to have an especially well-informed perspective on the general good. Second, it is even more difficult to imagine the process of sorting through various sets of consequences of one's actions under conditions of emergency. Robinson Crusoe may have the time to deliberate about many of his decisions, but would an actual agent along the lines described by William Godwin be able to save either Fenelon or his servant if he paused, in the midst of a raging fire, to consider which to save?

33. In both Smart and Williams's accounts, utilitarianism functions as a split-screen intuitionism. That is, even though it sometimes has recourse to the apparent tough-mindedness of numerical comparison, its comparativism essentially involves individuals making choices by representing an array of possibilities to themselves and selecting one. They may know, more or less, how things like this have gone for other people—may, for instance, have a sense of how fires move and of how much time they'll have to reach the philosopher or his servant. But, in this characterization, which is certainly true of Smart's position and is possibly true even of aspects of Bentham's early writings, there is scarcely ever a plausible occasion for testing one's ordinary decisions to see how they have come out. Decisions thus can come to look like predictions about what will have made one—and a great number of others—happy, but the number of decisions that lead to acts that can be effectively weighed and measured after the fact looks like an absurdly small portion of one's activity in the world. Indeed, though Bentham was a vigorous opponent of the very idea of a deity, it is easy to understand why accounts of his position that follow the tracks I have been describing would see him as a crypto-theist.[13] For the very idea of arriving at an ultimate perspective on any action that would enable one to evaluate how much happiness one had produced looks like Priestleyan providentialism that simply happens to be unequipped with an explicitly acknowledged providential deity.

34. This problem particularly bedevils educational theory, because the pantheistic and utilitarian accounts (as Smart and Williams depict them) both accept the idea that one outcome or set of consequences may be superior to another and undermine that superiority for the future. Thus, anyone who appears in the guise of a teacher or a “Government House utilitarian” must look as though he is assuming ultimately unjustifiable power in relation to pupils, in relation to citizens. In the grip of this thought, various commentators, including Miran Bozovic in the introduction to Bentham's Panopticon writings, have thought that Jeremy and Samuel Bentham's vision for the Panopticon converted the superintendent or inspector into a god-equivalent.[14] They have seen his heightened powers of vision as a version of divine omniscience that implicitly included omnipotence as well, particularly as an effect of the inspector's frequent invisibility: as Bozovic puts it, “we are seen without seeing the one who sees us,” and “the panopticon is governed by a gaze and a voice which are desubjectivized, detached from their bearer—in a word, by gaze and voice *qua* objects” (*Panopticon Writings* 11). And to this account of the physics of gaze and voice is added a metaphysics; the anxiety of the prisoners or pupils in relation to the inspector is thought to be equivalent to the anxiety of believers in relation to a god who might, at any moment, suddenly and eternally decide their presently uncertain fates.

35. The question of power—the Panopticon as an instrument for wielding god-like omnipotence—has thus seemed to emerge as central, and has seemed particularly intractable in education, where an adult can seem (to himself and to a child) like a god-like being. Moreover, because analysts have frequently read the text simply as a recommendation of techniques for subordinating a large number of persons to the power of one, they have not noticed the connection between the Panopticon letters (of 1787) and postscripts (of 1791)—and they certainly have not noticed the jokes he makes along the way. Bentham, writing from Russia to his brother Samuel, who had initially proposed the idea of such a structure, becomes so conscious of warming to his theme that he begins suggesting that the Panopticon be adopted for seraglios (which represent for Bentham what “secret societies” represent for Kant—obedience without the spirit of freedom). But two features of his thinking here are particularly important. First, he elaborately modeled the usefulness of this kind of building and the arrangements it

allows and of comparing it with institutional buildings—prisons, hospitals, schools—then in use (so that he was not depicting an individual thinking about the greater or lesser utility of a particular course of action). Second, he stressed the way the transparency of the functioning of the prison or the school enabled the various inmates or students to be compared with one another—on the basis of observable behavior rather than the thoughts that might be imputed to a supposed rebel or criminal: the panopticon system, "confining its attention to *overt acts*, leaves thoughts and fancies to their proper *ordinary*, the court *above*" (*Panopticon Writings* 94).

36. Understanding how the providentialism of Barbauld and Priestley sundered reasoned deliberation from any reliable estimation of the consequences of one's decisions helps to explain why Bentham sought ways of making decisions and decision-making a more finite and circumscribed process than it was for those enlightened religionists. While they might imagine providence intervening to introduce justice into the world of human decision, he developed elaborate planning documents and explorations of the usefulness of specific views, on the one hand, and, on the other, systems like the Panopticon that intensified the perceptibility of the world by creating occasions for visible comparison of one person with others. If one could collect a group of proposals and compare them one with another, he thought, one would not need to demand of any proposal that it yield perfect consequences. Legislators might thus choose among proposals not by thinking about what was best in the best of all possible worlds but by thinking instead about which among these actual proposals realistically promised the best consequences. Panoptic superintendents, in the case of schools, might thus establish classes of students who were continually displaying the value of their achievement in the process of moving from one seat to another (going, for instance, to the head of the class). In the Panopticon and in his plan for Chrestomathic education Bentham aimed to contract the field in which comparisons would operate, so that the relative values of characteristics (such as height or weight) and the relative values of performances (in the oral examinations in spelling or geometry) would be immediately and objectively visible.

37. Religion appeared trivially in Bentham's Panopticon writings when he recommended that prisoners should attend religious services (while also saying that the particular religion and sect of these services was an indifferent matter). But his general line of thought suggests how religious belief itself was not accidentally and insignificantly linked to education. Religion, in his view, installed a god whose influence on humans and their commitment to their own actions was incompatible with their taking their actions seriously. The infinite perspective that Burke had associated with the sublime needed, he thought, to be combated rather than extolled—as became obvious in 1822 when Bentham (under the pseudonym Philip Beauchamp) published *An Analysis of the Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*. There he treated the question of the desirability of belief in the basic tenets of natural religion—that there is a deity who is omniscient and omnipotent, who knows everything that each and every person does and who punishes or rewards these deeds (and thoughts) in an afterlife. Whereas he noted that religious belief had frequently been seen as a spur to virtue, he thought it was just the opposite. From the standpoint of human action in the temporal world, Bentham judged belief in an omnipotent and omniscient deity to be nothing short of disastrous for human freedom and moral choice: "The unlimited agency of the Deity is equivalent to this universal espionage [of the most effective tyrant]. He is conceived as the unseen witness of every thing which passes our lips—indeed even of our thoughts [so that] it would be madness, therefore, to hazard an unfavorable judgment of his proceedings, while thus constantly under his supervision" (*Analysis* 53).

38. In that same discussion Bentham went on to challenge the usefulness of religion in a host of different ways. Suffice it to say here that one of the things that he was disputing was the way in which the notion of divine rewards and punishments created a speculative economy that effectively dissolved actions; punishments, that is, could become completely detached from actual crimes, as when flagellants punished themselves ritually, making punishment free-standing and not related to specific actions. (In

his educational writing, he similarly denounced the floggings that masters dispensed to children who failed to understand their lessons for misrepresenting lack of understanding as a crime and thus providing a distraction from a more substantial evaluation.) It was not until Bentham wrote the *Chrestomathia* in 1815 and 1816 that he developed his account of education in any great detail. But his writings on legal punishment and on religion are pertinent to his discussions of education, because they stem from the conviction that public institutions—the law of crime and punishment, hospitals, schools, and work-houses—should be seen as complex actors. A Benthamite prison thus concerns itself with questions of hygiene—clean water, a system for disposing of excrement—out of the same concern for sustaining life that Rousseau and Kant stress when recommending that mothers breast-feed their children. Taking decent steps to sustain an inmate's health is, Bentham thinks, a requirement for any system of punishment that doesn't intend to use prison to create the likelihood of punishing all crimes with death.[15]

39. Thus, while Bentham stressed that we should attend to the importance of proximity in rather trivial ways (and see, for instance, that we are likelier to act when the actions are, as it were, ready to hand, so that an A.T.M. that is nearer to us can charge us a fee that we wouldn't otherwise pay), his commitment to the claims of proximity was also more substantial. For in insisting upon the importance of health for pupils as for prisoners, Bentham was wedding himself to the primacy of the actual rather than the wishful conjecture. What Foucault has memorably described as the anatomy of detail in Panoptic systems drew its motivation from the sense that the conscious elaboration of social systems might help to anchor persons in the actual, and thus blot out appeals to a remote and, certainly, extra-experimental deity.

40. Indeed, many of the features of Benthamite utilitarian education that have been regularly criticized for their philistine indifference to reflection and reflectiveness and their attachment to the short and readily available answer stem directly from Bentham's efforts to drive metaphysics out of education. The public examination as Bell and Lancaster practiced it and as Bentham reworked it in his Chrestomathic writings aimed at great transparency. It settled on a subject and posed a series of different questions to the different students in a class—on the model that we have come to think of as that of the spelling bee. Correct responses allowed a student to continue in the examination; incorrect responses and failures to respond eliminated him or her. As the examination proceeded, each member of the group was evaluated in relation to the other members of the group. While Kant, by contrast, continued to advise a catechetical method and proposed that teachers draw out their lines of reasoning in detail, Bentham was so little interested in capturing private thoughts of the kind that spies would search out that students were not asked to show that they could thread their way through a demonstration. An answer was taken as evidence of the ability to produce that answer. And the intrinsic value of an answer—its correctness—was only one aspect of education; the relative value of that answer—the way it caused a particular student to advance or decline in the comparative rankings—was at least as important.

41. Bentham thus replaced metaphysical transcendentalism with the concrete transcendentals of specific social institutions. And while his schemes for the organization of education may have extended educational opportunities to more persons and made learning proceed more rapidly than it had done under the tutorial model, they offered no opening onto sublimity. Indeed, he set his plans for the intensification of perceptibility against the very kind of obscurity that Burke had associated with the sublime. While Burke had portrayed individual uncertainty about power as a key element of its force, Bentham sought ever greater transparency, developing techniques that made the actual physical arrangements of persons in social structures like classes, workhouses, and prisons yield up a series of ongoing displays of relative value rendered visible. While Burke had insisted upon the importance of a metaphysics even to the idea of physical power, Bentham aimed to colonize the metaphysical arena that had been claimed by morality with physicality squared—a physicality that rendered values as well as persons and objects in perceptible form and that replaced the dramatic actions implicit in sublime

power with a representational scheme that made even relatively slight and inconspicuous gestures like omissions appear as actions. Rousseau's model of education had encouraged pupils to discover natural concepts through their actions. Bentham's scheme represented human action as so thoroughly incorporating a relation to society that it almost ceased to be intelligible outside that relation.

42. Because Bentham's writings appeared during his lifetime in highly-edited and frequently bowdlerized form, it is easy to imagine that Kant would simply have assimilated Bentham to prudentialism. In that line of thought, he would have seen Benthamite utilitarianism as an analogue to one of his examples of the moral limits of effectively good behavior. Considering the case of a merchant who adopts a standard price for adults and children alike when he could have exploited the child's ignorance of money and pricing, Kant saw the merchant's upstanding behavior as only resembling moral action rather than instantiating it. For him, the merchant's action was simply an example of self-interest taking a longer view and passing up the chance to extract an exorbitant price from an innocent in the present out of a desire to continue to do business in the future. Bentham would have treated the merchant's behavior without discriminating among his motives at the outset, and would not have distinguished between the merchant's acting out of fairness, on the one hand, and his consciousness of the business advantages that would accrue to his acting fairly in his dealings with everyone. Kant, by contrast, produces an account of behavior that sees it less an outward sign that must be accepted in itself than as a symptom of a capacity for morality. And, as with the sublimity that the aesthetic judgment recognizes in seeing the power of its own capacity to think past the limits of sense, morality becomes a statement of how our experience cannot be derived exclusively from sense and the perspicuousness of social custom. Thus, although Kant pays deference to educational experiments that had been undertaken by his contemporaries, his account of education does not revolve around studies of the quickest way of promoting quickness in pupils. Instead, he centers his educational theory around his claims for moral judgment as the most basic of all human acts. Whereas it might count as a problem for some that one cannot tell whether the merchant is honest from virtue or from prudence or whether a criminal is indeed conscience-stricken, Kant is perfectly content to point to a logic underlying social practice and to affirm its strength even when persons do not behave virtuously. The very fact that even the merely prudential man wants to be seen as honest suggests the fundamental importance of honesty in general; the very fact that someone is contrite and wants to appear contrite reveals the basic appeal of morality.

43. To hear Kant tell it, he never intended to write three critiques. Indeed, he says that he had not appreciated the importance of the aesthetic judgment until some time after he had produced the First Critique, with its account of the extent and the limits of our knowledge of objects in the physical world, and the Second, with its presentation of the claims of morality, the human capacity that Kant identified with our ability to will to act in a fashion that commands our respect. The Third Critique thus joined the Second as a previously-unanticipated investigation. For, Kant says, he did not identify pure reason, practical reason, and aesthetic judgment as the crucial human faculties and then set out to produce companion volumes on each. Instead, he claimed to have discovered the distinctiveness of the various faculties and the importance of capturing that distinctiveness in ways that pantheistic providentialism, for all its efforts at linearity, never could. For him, the very line of argument that had denied the objective reality of the categories applied to noumena (in the theoretical reason of the First Critique) itself opened on to a demonstration of their reality in practical cognition (understood as the freedom of the human will). The various faculties needed to be seen as distinctive so as to reveal their harmonious working—and particularly so as to demonstrate the actuality of such an unseen force as moral judgment, with its frequent repudiation of what is and its opinions on what is not, or omissions.

44. Taken together, the critiques suggest why Kant would have outlined a pedagogy that differed rather substantially from most of the approaches that represented the state of the art at the end of the eighteenth century. Kant shared a commitment to the idea of human progress with his contemporaries, but his analysis of the operations of reason in three different and distinctive domains enabled him to

challenge simple progressivist programs and to claim, instead, that a checking of forward momentum in one arena (the speculative reason that he analyzed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) might yield progress in another (the moral exercise of the will that he described in the *Critique of Practical Reason*).

45. Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Lectures on Pedagogy* that his Konigsberg colleague Friedrich Theodor Rink edited and published in 1803 are remarkably interrelated. In preparing his edition of the *Lectures*, Rink assembled various "individual scraps of paper" (434) on which Kant had written notes for his lectures; and he repeated passages if he encountered the same basic scrap in two different places in the overall scheme. The text is, then, so redundantly and repetitively Kant's as to count as an imperfect one. Yet it has great importance, because it gives an indication of Kant's thinking over a period of ten years that overlaps with his publication of the first two critiques. Kant lectured on pedagogy first in the winter of 1776-77 and finally in the winter of 1786-87 (and also gave the course of lectures in the summer of 1780 and the winter of 1783-84). In the lectures on pedagogy, Kant takes a number of cues from Rousseau. He attends to the physical well-being of infants and young children and echoes Rousseau's advice about the wisdom that mothers show when they breast-feed their infants and avoid restraining children with swaddling clothes and leading strings that might damage a child's developing chest in the process of keeping her well within sight of a parent or servant.

46. Yet Kant differs from Rousseau in at least one crucial regard: he spends a great deal less time than Rousseau in discussing the importance of a child's actions in the world. Rousseau depicts the child in *Emile* as something like a basic research scientist who learns how to interact with the world experimentally. Kant, by contrast, announces at the outset of his lectures on pedagogy that "one generation educates the next" (9:442; p. 437). Thus, while Rousseau's fictional philosophy represents Emile as being protected from the education of civilization by the tutor who runs interference and shields Emile from society in his early years, Kant never engages in such a thought experiment. Instead, while he contrasts the way in which animals can rely on their instincts and thus need no education in order to perform the various activities that sustain them in life, he draws a parallel between humans and birds. Birds, he says, do not sing their particular songs by instinct, because they are so completely canaries or sparrows that they inevitably sing the song given to them biologically. And he goes far enough down this path to describe testing to see what happens to a bird's song if the eggs or young of one species are exchanged for those of another: "If one brings the young sparrows into a room, where they cannot hear the sparrows outside, they learn the canaries' song, and one gets singing sparrows" (Kant, *Ped* 9:443; p. 439).

47. With such an example, Kant acknowledges an issue that Rousseau's carefully-staged educational discussions had confronted only indirectly. An educational process that acknowledges the importance of what other, older people know does not merely speed up the process of individual learning. Rather, Kant is first acknowledging the extent to which the relative incapacity of humans at birth creates an opening for culture—for the passage of information between one generation and another—simply because an infant or young child is unable to make the kind of choices that animals instinctively make. Indeed, the implicit thought is that, without this most basic sense of culture, the world would be one in which parents required their children to treat themselves as test subjects. The physical existence of children would be threatened by their independence, because they would be unassisted by any previous evaluations of the physical world. What would be lost in the process is the ability to benefit from other people's experience, to accept someone else's word for it that nightshade is poisonous and, hence, to be avoided, or that gravity causes bodies to fall to earth rather than to float in air so that one will know enough to exercise caution on a precipice.

48. Indeed, Kant's account of education is thoroughly bound up with moral judgment, as instanced by an individual's willingness to hold herself accountable to herself for her promises and to pass judgment on

herself for defaulting on them. Moreover, this account of the moral faculty produces a strange effect on his account of education. He depicts educational progress—indeed, the progress of individual humans and humanity at large—as resting on a recognition of the faculty of practical reason as virtually innate. Whereas many educationalists attempted to use stories to convey moral lessons, and others developed elaborately progressive curricula, Kant's discussions of education scarcely touch on such matters. Novels shouldn't be used in education, Kant thought, because they have too many moving parts and overload the memory. But catechisms should. Thus, we see Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals* producing an example of an interchange between the teacher who "elicits from his pupil's reason, by questioning, what he wants to teach him" in a *Fragment of a moral catechism*—of which it can be said that the most plausible parts are the notations indicating that the pupil "is silent" in the face of such questions as "What is your greatest, in fact your whole, desire in life?" (6:480-481, p. 593).

49. Kant has a particularly urgent need to rely on examples. With an account of moral judgment that stresses its independence from external determination in the form of prudential calculations (that produce such things as the merchant's maxim that "honesty is the best policy") and incentives (that make things like public recognition a spur to good actions), Kant's account of morality runs the risk of looking sublime by virtue of its distance from the actual world. When he insists that "*the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" "fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence" (*CPrR* 5:162, p. 269), he draws lines of connection between a consciousness of one's place in the external world and "worlds upon worlds and systems of systems" and, on the other hand, an infinity within "my invisible self, my personality" that is only discoverable by the understanding and that connects the person to the world by acts of internal moral legislation. The risk of such description is that it sounds as though it has a hard time dealing with the business of living in an ordinary world. And thus he takes comfort in relating various cases in which he says that a child could pass a correct verdict. One might, he says, tell a ten-year-old child

> the story of an honest man whom someone wants to induce to join the calumniators of an innocent but otherwise powerless person (say, Anne Boleyn, accused by Henry VII of England). He is offered gain, that is, great gifts of high rank; he rejects them. This will produce mere approval and applause in the listener's soul, because it is gain. Now threats of loss begin. Among these calumniators are his best friends, who now refuse him their friendship; close relatives, who threaten to disinherit him (he is not wealthy); powerful people, who can pursue and hurt him in all places and circumstances; a prince who threatens him with loss of freedom and even of life itself. But, so that the measure of suffering may be full and he may also feel the pain that only a morally good heart can feel very deeply, represent his family, threatened with extreme distress and poverty, as *imploring him to yield* and himself, though upright, yet with a heart not hard or insensible either to compassion or to his own distress; represent him at a moment when he wishes that he had never lived to see the day that exposed him to such unutterable pain and yet remains firm in his resolution to be truthful, without wavering or even doubting; then my young listener will be raised step by step from mere approval to admiration, from that to amazement, and finally to the greatest veneration and a lively wish that he himself could be such a man (though certainly not in such circumstances); and yet virtue is here worth so much only because it costs so much, not because it brings any profit. (*CPrR* 5:156-157, p. 264)

Rousseau might well have imagined such a child responding to the same story very differently. But Kant takes the human interest in virtue to be so much the cornerstone of reason that he proposes a combination of contemporary and historical gossip as the ideal teaching tool. When people socialize, he observes, "their entertainment includes" story-telling, jesting, and arguing, and they particularly like arguing about the *moral worth* of this or that action by which the character of some person is to be

made out" (*CPrR* 5:153, p. 262). Moreover, he goes on to marvel at the fact that educators of young people have not made better use of "this propensity of reason to enter with pleasure upon even the most subtle examination of the practical questions put to them" (263).

50. Bentham may have modeled the possibility of progress by suggesting the appeal of the best available answer and the best available actor, but for Kant the truly sublime achievement in education is the one in which a student uncovers a certainty about her moral judgments that is an accomplishment by virtue of its seeming never to have needed to be learned. He even proposes that cases be put to students as part of "a game of judgment in which children can compete with one another" (*CPrR* 5:155, p. 263). Education thus becomes gossip methodized—as it becomes the occasion for uncovering a moral sense so strong that a child can profit even from negative examples and from cultivating her confidence that she can pass a negative judgment on what she sees. Kant's version of education, then, focuses squarely on the supersensible nature of moral judgment. Even if one is mistaken in the judgment one passes on another person's actions, the education of moral judgment saves appearances by uncovering the importance of the fact that we make evaluations of them.

Notes

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 67. I am characterizing the large argument of Bourdieu's book, but the first chapter, "The Aristocracy of Culture," in which he describes the reproduction of class distinction by means of the exercise of taste, and "Postscript: Towards a 'Vulgar' Critique of 'Pure' Critiques" are of particular interest to anyone interested in sorting out the relationship between education and aesthetic experience.

2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 5-8. Bourdieu is here positioning himself against Levi-Strauss's objectivism as well as against the phenomenological approach of Marcel Mauss that Levi-Strauss strongly criticizes.

3 I use the term "social" here in its distinction from "sociable," because Bentham aims particularly to capture the value of behavior to social groups seen as wholes rather than as collections of persons and personalities.

4 Joseph Priestley, *The History and Present State of Electricity* (London: J. Johnson and C. Rivington, 1794), ii. Quoted in Steven Johnson, *The Invention of Air:A Story of Science, Faith, Revolution, and the Birth of America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), Kindle location 449-53.

5 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason in Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5:99, p. 218. Hereafter I shall refer to this critique as *CPrR*. The Cambridge edition indicates the pagination of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften* in the margins of pages, and I follow their lead in providing information about that standard pagination for readers using an edition other than the Cambridge edition of the *Practical Philosophy*.

6 The description I have given here sounds suspiciously like a description of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." My guess is that there is a stronger connection than has yet been identified between that poem and intellectual currents that I'm trying to sketch in this essay.

7 Alan Richardson has a particularly effective account of Barbauld in *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 128-30.

8 Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

9 Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2004), pp. 47-48. For our purposes, M.H. Abrams provides a particularly useful account of the chiliastic aspects of Priestley's work when he writes that: "the Unitarian leaders Richard Price and Joseph Priestley (who combined the careers of chemist and preacher) led a chorus of prophets who invested the political events in France with the explosive power of the great Western myth of apocalypse, and so expanded a local phenomenon into the perfervid expectation that man everywhere was at the threshold of an earthly paradise restored," M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), p. 331.

10 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), I:301-302 (1850).

11 In the Introduction to *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls describes himself as developing his theory of political liberalism in response to a "serious problem," namely that "a modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines." Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xvi.

12 J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). One might not want to put much emphasis on Williams's sensitivity to the lexicon of utilitarianism and his sense of its overlap with a religious vocabulary, but I think that his depiction of utilitarianism as a trivialization of individual decisions in the name of higher, or more remote, ends harmonizes with Kant's argument that natural religion leaves human decisions little freedom or scope. Ironically, Bentham, utilitarian though he surely is, presses the same general line of argument in his arguments against religion.

13 Jeremy Bentham, *The Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003). This long essay was published under a pseudonym (Philip Beauchamp) and the editors of the Bowring edition of Bentham's works omitted it and all his discussions of religion. The most reliable testimony to the essay's authorship is that John Stuart Mill refers to it and its specific arguments as Bentham's in his writing on religion, and particularly in his "On Religion."

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The Sublime and Education

Afterthoughts on the Sublime and Education; or, "Teachable Moments?"

Ian Balfour, York University

1. Aristotle says of metaphor that it is the one thing that could not be taught. To judge from a good many accounts, had he added a second, it might easily have been the sublime. The sublime seems to be something one experiences or not, one feels or not, at the same time as it is peculiarly resistant to language and to conceptualization, with so many treatments of it having to resort merely to negative characterizations of it or characterizations of it as negative: a failure of this or that, an inability to do this or that, most of all to represent what happens or happened, or even just to express what one has felt.

2. The terms ‘sublime' and ‘education,' on the face of it, then, might most plausibly be "defined by their contrast," as Frances Ferguson phrases it at the outset of her essay. "The Sublime" conjures up visions of the Alps, the loftiest poetry, or threatening storms at sea. "Education" summons rather different pictures: children in a classroom, a scholar or student poring over a text, an experiment in a lab. As such, the sublime and education are strange bedfellows, even if we know that without learning something about the sublime, a student of Romanticism would be rather clueless about significant aspects of the era's culture. The sublime should be part of every Romanticist's ongoing "history of an education," in Paul Hamilton's phrase. The authors gathered here make the case variously for the value, perhaps even the need, to think the two—the sublime *and* education—together, probing their articulations about as well as anything, so far as I can tell, that has been written on this doubly elusive topic. Drawing on a wide range of expertise that overlaps, in the manner of a Venn diagram, in aesthetic theory, the authors (eminent, underground famous, up-and-coming) tend to explore charged instances of sublime scenarios that have consequences for education or often themselves engage education directly. Certainly the sublime as a topic lends itself to a kind of prismatic investigation, not least because, as Paul Hamilton shows, there are, as of late, close to seven types of sublimity (he isolates at least five for us) as refracted through different sorts of intellectual formations for which schools would be too strict a term. Hamilton demonstrates how interestingly symptomatic are late twentieth-century accounts of the sublime, with the topic being something of a cipher in which divergent investments can be inscribed. This in part responds to the cipher-like quality of the sublime in the first place, as elaborated by the canonical and not-so-canonical theorists. Something has happened but we don't know what it is, do we? And so we grope for explanations, we make up more or less compelling stories: speculative, empirical, pseudo-empirical. In the thinking of the sublime there have come to be important differences of emphasis between Longinian transport or ecstasy (*ekstasis*), Burkean terror and Kantian unboundedness (*Unbegrentzheit*) and even when there is a good deal of overlap in the predicates of the sublime invoked, there can be signal differences in the aesthetico-political or moral frameworks or narratives into which the sublime is convincingly—or not—inscribed. And even when the wide array of theorists and critics agrees on the broad outlines of what constitutes it, there is often a good deal of difference at the level of the example, where, in writing on the sublime, a lot of the action is.

3. Though the authors have their historical center of gravity in Romanticism, the essays often lead helpfully outside of the era, not just to theorists roughly contemporary with us but back to Longinus and forward to the likes of Wilde and Benjamin. Furthest afield from Romanticism proper, perhaps, is

Deborah's White's careful analysis of Derrida and the ‘menace' to philosophy, with her (and his) locating something sublime—are you sitting down? — in the *university* (which gives a whole new resonance to ‘higher' education). Yet White's entrée into our topic comes via Derrida's various readings of Kant who thought seriously—perhaps the most seriously—about the sublime and the very idea of the university at more or less the same time and at the onset of Romanticism (we sometimes forget that *The Critique of Judgment* was not published until 1791).[1] And Christopher Braider, best known as an analyst of European Baroque culture, occasionally goes back to the Baroque as a prelude to Enlightenment and Romanic configurations, though his focus on the latter perhaps is an implicit argument for thinking of the Baroque, as some have done, extending up to somewhere around 1800, not least because the over-the-topness of the Romantic sublime surely harkens back to the extravagance of various Baroques.[2]

4. The sublime is not easily categorizable or contained as a historical phenomenon: the concept (or its terms: *hypsos*, *sublimitas*, *sublime*, *das Erhabene*) has a very discontinuous history. It has its ups and downs, its vogues, its exits and entrances. Discourse *about the* sublime is more "dateable," as Braider terms it, than the thing itself (which is not exactly a ‘thing'). For modernity, it emerges rather precisely through Boileau's translation of and then commentary on Longinus's treatise that had languished in manuscript form for centuries and then did not make much of a splash on its publication in the Renaissance.[3] Arguably it reaches its high-water mark—or is it high-mountain mark?—in the decades before and after 1800 when the word and the concept verge on the ubiquitous. The collective enterprise realized in this volume illuminates especially Romantic versions of the sublime (and they are by no means of a piece in this one period) but not in a way that loses sight of other historical formations, not losing the forest for a few of its trees, as it were. Such forays can only deepen one's sense of the historical specificity of the various ‘sublimes': if one stays confined in a single period one risks losing just what is historical (and not) about it. And within one and the same period, it is not quite as if everyone is on the same page, either.

5. One can see why of late any number of intellectuals, especially those writing in the mode of a loose or severe post-structuralism or those even just indebted to it, would have been drawn to the one moment in high philosophy (in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) when, if only in the ‘circumscribed' domain of the sublime, the possibilities of representation were scrutinized most rigorously and found to reach their limit, indeed to fail. Perhaps with a little too much glee and with a tendency to generalize a tad hyperbolically—or perhaps one should just say ‘speculatively'—the crisis of representation once located in the sublime was somehow, in the last decades of the twentieth century, absolutized to inform a critique of the representational character of language as such and, to some minds, as a way to characterize no less than all, *grosso modo*, of twentieth-century art, as was the case for Lyotard. Sometimes it doesn't take much effort to sympathize with Adorno's suggestion that we might as well abandon the category of the sublime altogether—and especially for a culture that has outlived the pertinence of the concept that tends to come with so much idealist(ic), moral(istic) baggage. (Adorno prefers to speak of the "shudder".)[4] But Lyotard is extreme in his treatment of the sublime character of twentieth-century art and even the sometimes extravagant thinkers that Hamilton associates with a political sublime (Blanchot, Nancy and company) are actually relatively sober when it comes to keeping the sublime in its place. The essays in this volume together and individually prove that the sublime is still very much a category to reckon with, and not just for historical reasons. As is the case with the great Enlightenment thinkers on the sublime, we have to try hard to be clear about what is often the very opposite of clear.

6. If late-twentieth-century thought returns repeatedly to its great forerunners in (the age of) Kant and Hegel, it is not as if the later intellectual formation collapses back into the former. A good many of the distinctions between Deleuze and Kant, or Lyotard and Kant, are palpable and profound. The poststructuralist *maître-penseurs* might take their orientations from Kant but they rarely rest content to

remain within his frameworks, much less accept the content of his claims. We might say that these thinkers are fascinated by the sublime without having any commitment to the transcendence that is almost always thought to be an integral part of the experience of the sublime, or at least its outcome. Not every older version of the sublime was quite so triumphant in its march toward the transcendental and the moral as was Kant's: Burke's, for one, was far more a matter of the sensorium, of nerve fibers and other bodily registers of feeling. One felt elevated, in Burke's scheme, after the usually terrifying (or quasi-terrifying) experience but without quite the *vocation* of the sublime called attention to by a number of the authors here, Kant's being the most resolute version of it.[5] But Kant, bolstered somewhat and popularized by Schiller, has carried the day rather more than Burke in this regard, and so the shadow of the moral hovers over (or under) the sublime more often than not, which is one of the reasons it can and perhaps has to be linked with education.

7. The fact that the astonishing moment of a "blockage of the vital forces" in Kant can lead, so swiftly, to an assertion of a person's newly elevated self and at least an opening to the domain of the moral shows how a lot can depend on whether one construes the sublime primarily as a moment or as a sequence (as a trajectory or even a plot). The canonical theorists are (implicitly) divided on this matter. For Longinus the sublime tends to occur suddenly, in an instant, something like a thunderbolt, or if in a text, then a striking passage rather than the text as a whole. Longinus may well think of *The Iliad*, despite Homer's nodding once or twice, as sublime in general, but he demonstrates its sublimity via selected quotations, by parts. This is so even if the force of that instant depends on its placement in a whole, sometimes modeled on the organic totality of a body. And even when Longinus cites what might look like a ‘whole' poem by Sappho (which is also presumably a fragment) it is a poem about a whole body perilously dispersed into its parts, to the point of figurative death and disarticulation.[6] For Burke too, the sublime seems more a momentary phenomenon than not, sometimes predicated by ‘suddenness,' as opposed, say, to the ‘gradual variation' of beauty. (As Frances Ferguson reminds us, boredom, in the scheme, would be a pretty sure sign that one is *not* experiencing the sublime.) The force of the trajectory of the sublime, or one imposed on it, is clearest in Kant with the posited sequence of breakdown (of imagination) and recovery (by reason) after a somewhat mysterious sacrifice of the imagination to reason.[7] The moment of blockage in Kant is followed so immediately by a resurgence of them and a turn inward to recognize one's surpassing power of reason to think beyond the senses that various and arguably distinct moments are thought of as of a piece. And it is not just any narrative, but one that turns from one state to its opposite, from a subject being enthralled or violently jolted out of oneself to a state of exalted freedom.

8. The fraught relation of a sublime moment to the larger narrative whole that would encompass it is a central preoccupation of McCarthy's telling analysis of Coleridge's *Christabel* and its reception. McCarthy cannily focuses on the event and idea of suspension in *Christabel* by the author famous for formulating the notion of the "willing suspension of disbelief" as a requirement for reading a good deal of literature. In *Christabel* our possible suspension of disbelief isn't quite enough to suspend all our problems in interpreting the poem or even to know the essentials of what happened. Riddled with gaps, hesitations, and then spectacularly lacking an ending, the poem poses more problems for the reader than even other fragmentary enigmas by Coleridge, such as "Kubla Khan." Schleiermacher's doctrine of the hermeneutic circle dictates that we make sense of the whole from the (ongoing) succession of the parts but in *Christabel* the whole is so lacking in its implicitly projected parts (as indicated too by Coleridge's repeated, unfulfilled desire to finish the poem) that interpretation finds itself in a kind of permanent abeyance. McCarthy aptly enlists Avital Ronell's pioneering work in what we might call "stupidity studies," proposing that Coleridge's poem makes us, as Hazlitt's early reviews suggest, stupid. This runs contrary to most literature, which tends to flatter the reader into thinking that she or he knows what's going on and usually knowing more than the characters inside the fiction—dramatic irony thrives on this. This sort of readerly knowing is far more muted and intermittent in the experience of *Christabel* than in most poems. Coleridge, as some of the drafts show, deliberately withdraws or

withholds major ‘evidence' that he had planted in earlier versions, evidence that would help explain things. The ‘final' unfinished poem rests on or perhaps even revels in what is not spelled out and yet around which everything turns, such as the precise sort of character or creature Geraldine is and what happens (and why) in those moments (forest, bed, etc.) that so determine the rest of the action. McCarthy helps recall the character and texture of the sublime that entails the dumbstruck subject, thus marking a perhaps surprising affinity between stupidity and sublimity.[8] Even Kant's *poet* is rather like the ordinary wide-eyed merely perceiving, non-conceptual, non-conceptualizing subject who registers things "as they strike the eye." This non-comprehension in the moment and this inability to "tell" prompts attempts at comprehension or some sort of intellectual recovery in its aftermath.

9. To the extent that *Christabel* is structured in terms of enigmatic moments followed by attempts to account, more or less, for those enigmas, it has something of the structure and texture of allegory, which Paul de Man defines, as in his Pascal essay, as the sequential unfolding of a narrative whose referent is not in itself historical. These moments in *Christabel* are so disruptive as almost to fall outside of the poem's temporality except that they determine the stupefied responses that try to come to terms with them. The narrative points, disjunctively, back to these moments without exactly comprehending them. A number of critics have rightly drawn attention to the proximity of the sublime and allegory or at least a certain mode of allegory, characterized by the non-coincidence of text and meaning.[9] And Coleridge's allegorical mode in *Christabel* is not of the sort that even tells us what the allegorical referent in question is, the way, say, Spenser spells things out in the titles of each book of *The Faerie Queene* or Coleridge himself does in the odd lyric, such as "Time, Real and Imaginary: An Allegory." In the face of Coleridge's allegory, criticism resorts to suspensions of its own, a discourse of ‘if, and, and buts,' reproducing the suspension(s) of the poem in trying to come to terms with it, a kind of sublime non-comprehension that is folded back into the poem. All this is set with exemplary clarity in McCarthy's essay.

10. Moments of more purely lyric intensity are the focus of Forest (‘Tres') Pyle's magisterial analysis of the Shellyean sublime and some related post-cursors in what he provocatively calls ‘radical aestheticism.' Here too the specter of allegory hovers over the proceedings, as we are witness, via his reading, to Shelley's attempt to point, in textbook deictic fashion, to something that positively eludes representation. Pyle offers us valuable lessons from his own pedagogical experience regarding the possibilities and difficulties of teaching the sublime and its ‘experience.' In the classroom he draws on numerous examples that post-date Romanticism to which students might more easily relate, as foils to Shelley and the Romantic sublime. For a good many undergraduates these days, Romanticism is something of a foreign language and so—aside from the intrinsic value of Velvet Underground and Patti Smith (a high canon of its own!)—if it helps to induce or seduce students into the sublime that way, there is no possible downside to such traffic between (roughly) contemporary culture and the literature of two centuries ago. And yet the goal is clearly Shelley (and company) where the stakes are as enormous as the Alps about which he writes.

11. Of all of the major Romantics Shelley seems most heavily to rely on the simile more than metaphor: it becomes virtually his signature figure of speech. Pyle's painstaking analysis of the opening sections of both "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" lays bare the vertigo of likeness and likenesses that permeates these poems.[10] Different in texture from most instances of simile by virtue of multiplication and imbrication, the Shelleyean simile is as perplexing as it is illuminating. Sometimes it even has the effect of troubling for us any clear sense of what is the figure for a corresponding ground and vice versa, a relation on which the coherence of figural meaning—and just plain meaning proper—would seem to depend. One often encounters what looks like a simile within a simile, which is hard to unpack at any pace other than what Nietzsche called "slow reading." If in *Christabel* it is an enigmatic event or two that punctuates the action, in the relatively uneventful poems of Shelley, it is the figure that, *à la* Longinus, tends to prompt and arrest understanding.

12. Pyle charts the striking importance, even at the heights of the sublime in "Mont Blanc," of the simple, insistent act of linguistic pointing. Shelley's elder contemporary Hegel had demonstrated, in the chapter on "Sense-Certainty" from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, some of the complexities involved in *writing* some of the most common instances of deixis, such as ‘now' and ‘this.' "Now," for most intents and purposes, is one thing in speech and quite another in writing. Pyle's masterful reading of "Mont Blanc" especially attends to the centrality and complexity of the deictic gesture in Shelley, the moment when language seems to strain to point, in an analogue of physical finger-pointing, to things in the world and perhaps beyond: "the power is there." Can language do this? It's a measure of the power of Shelley's writing—a kind of writing not simply divorced from speaking—that he achieves something like it. And yet the poem is also informed equally by a powerful sense of the limits of such language, pointing to the failure of pointing.[11] Pyle underscores how these failures are linked explicitly, in Shelley, to teaching, poetic versions of the "education of error" invoked in "On Life."

13. But even if this dynamic were not explicit, the related pattern of positing and erasure, of setting things up only to have them or make them tremble, is well schematized by Pyle, in "Mont Blanc" as well as in "The Trimuph of Life," with its conveyed sense of meaning as an "ever receding horizon," not allowing much to settle, not even on or with a bedrock category such as "life." Pyle highlights Shelley's recasting of Rousseau's vision of history and "a shape all light," a blindingly dark correlative of the *fiat lux* set-piece from Genesis that the tradition had generally promoted as the paradigmatic example of the sublime. It is no wonder, one gleans from Pyle's reading, that (literal) questions figure so prominently in Shelley, and especially at the end of poems and when they do so, they are not the sort of questions that are easily resolved: thus real rather than (merely) rhetorical questions. It is an analysis indebted to and worthy of de Man on Shelley and Yeats (who had learned a thing or two from Shelley.)

14. Pyle's text inscribes itself into a long and lofty tradition of letters on aesthetic education (Schiller, De Quincey, etc.). The letters seem not casually dated: one of the last is dated November 4, the day of the American presidential election, and another is assigned the day before the anniversary of 9/11 (and maybe we should also recall that September 11th is Adorno's birthday?). Pyle shows, not unlike Hamilton, how the sublime as aesthetic exceeds itself, often spilling over into the ethical and into the political, though without any political future programmed or set out in advance. In the poems in question, "Mont Blanc" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the political is invoked but in an abstract way. (What *exactly* does Shelley have in mind by speculating on the repeal of "large codes of fraud and woe"? What do we know from the poem itself about those politics, even if we know from any number of other Shelley texts, including poems, very precise things about his political stances and general orientations?) The sublime stakes out the stakes of power, and thus Shelley via Kant can lead easily to Spivak, to say nothing of matters of power in his own time. This trajectory can't simply be ascribed to Pyle's having been a student of Spivak, as powerful a formative influence as that must have been. The sublime here, far from being a hoary category of bygone, exploded systems, is a provocation, though a curiously open-ended one, as is already the case in Kant.

15. The skeletal sinews of Shelley's sublime coincide with an inspired phrase of Paul Hamilton's to characterize the sublime: "abstract expressionism." Seemingly anachronistic, the phrase gestures toward the divided character of the sublime. On the one hand, it suggests the irreducibly singular character of each experience of the sublime, first, if we are to believe Kant, as a feeling, and then followed by a judgment or articulation of that feeling. As such, it can be considered an expression of a subject. On the other hand, the dynamics of the experience vault one out of and above oneself, a movement of universalization achieved partly by way of the generality of a shared language and a putatively shared judgment, even if, according to Kant, we can only, by subreption (that is to say, improperly) call something sublime. At once expressive and abstract, the sublime then is primed to be filled in again, in our intellectual coming to terms with it, by something a little less abstract: hence the considerable variety of ways of configuring the sublime in the heyday of its rediscovery in the late-

twentieth century.

16. To my mind, Hamilton's central question arising from the confrontation with late twentieth-century understandings of the sublime and the canonical theorists in the age of Kant is this: "Can the sublime educate us in ways no longer entailing enlightened self-aggrandisement?" It is both hard to accept and hard simply to dismiss the arch-Enlightenment determination by Kant of the sublime as entailing a movement from the failure of the subject at one level (a breakdown of the imagination) to a subsequent sense of what might variously be called elation or even enlightenment and an expanded sense of one's powers. Any number of testimonies—a crucial factor in Burke, as Frances Ferguson showed long ago —assert some kind of restitution and expansion of self as a consequence of undergoing the sublime. Who are we to doubt this? And yet it is not hard to see how the experience of the sublime in some formulations of it shows, as Hamilton observes, "the European sensibility fastened to a damaging exercise in self-consolidation." At their worst, accounts of the effects of the sublime are starkly self-congratulatory and they often rest on the rather flimsy basis that the self has survived a kind of fictitious threat (not real terror but a distanced, aesthetic version of it). Thus if, as Hamilton notes, de Man is guilty of "freezing the development of German Idealism in Kant's third Critique and in a Kojèvian reading of Hegel's objections to Kant," it is perhaps because Kant did not exactly earn the right to go from his account of the sublime experience proper to its subsequent self-aggrandisement, with reason patting itself on the back, which follows almost instantly upon the breakdown of imagination. In de Man's reading, it's not clear that Kant or Hegel (though the primary targets of his critique are commentators on them) really left behind the "prosaic materiality of the letter" they seemed to. (And Hegel arguably freezes his own sublime by virtually confining it "in the strict sense" to ancient Judaism and so to a certain, if once exalted, dustbin of history.)

17. Yet Hamilton (in a way that parallels the way Spivak, as recalled by Forest Pyle) sees in the sublime a "lever," admirably explores the ways in which the sublime, thanks to its shaking up of the self, creates the conditions for new configurations of subjecthood that are freer and more open to a world far more multi-cultural (and thus less solipsistically ‘subjective') than could have been imagined even in the wannabe-cosmopolitanism of Kant. We still need to be wary of the grandiose fantasy of emancipation that is the seductive side of the sublime, but, in Hamilton's view, the sublime, in exceeding the aesthetic, educates us of the "productive insufficiency" of both philosophy and art —which can only be a good thing, ‘now' and again.

18. Refusing to choose between the only seemingly opposed poles of history and theory, a posture that helps do justice to both, Hamilton finds a pertinent model for a post-Kantian treatment of the sublime in Jena Romanticism's elaborations of literature, language, and the self, with the somewhat unlikely source being Schlegel's notion of *Unverständlichkeit* that de Man renders as "non-understanding." It is this non-understanding, Hamilton contends, that "releases the educative power of art." For Schlegel, the absence of a certain understanding is the very ground for "the welfare of families and nations," a productive tension for ‘subjects' in more ways than one. One can't quite say what the future of this non-understanding will be, but it looks likely to surpass its totalizing competitors.

19. For Christopher Braider, the supposedly non-totalizing character of the sublime has a tendency to turn into its opposite: despite the vagaries of its history, it now seems as if "we never talked about anything else." The sublime does indeed have a tendency to take over, to trump anything in sight. In the third Critique the sublime started out as a "mere appendage" to the beautiful, but Kant ended up writing way more about the sublime than the beautiful, dividing his analysis into two substantial parts and making it into the lynchpin in the whole system of the critical philosophy—the ultimate linking of imagination with reason. And yet, from Braider's point of view, all this "talk of the sublime never gets anywhere." In this, the discourse on the sublime is like (the sublime) Milton who "has only one thing to say, endlessly repeated in different words." But there is, despite all this, a way forward, which he

characterizes as the way "back out."

20. Braider is attentive to all this talk that gets us nowhere, recalling the structure of especially the Kantian sublime in its contrast with the beautiful. About the beautiful, "we" tend to disagree (despite the Kantian imputation of universal agreement) but "in the case of the sublime, we *never* argue." We either get or feel the sublime or we don't. End of story. Except that stories, and different stories, tend to fill up the chasm that opens up on the far side of the sublime experience. In this sense the sublime "demands a pedagogy." I'm not sure I agree, to judge from the canonical or other theorists, that "you have to be *taught* to feel it," as Braider contends. People might be differently acculturated or educated or experienced such that a prior knowledge/experience prepares the ground for the ungrounding that is the sublime, but is this to say one has to be "taught" to feel it? Braider, however, does instantly revise himself: "or better, you have to be taught that you *already* feel it." Certainly arbiters of discourse, such as Coleridge, do this as literally as possible: telling people precisely what language, what aesthetic vocabulary to employ in rendering their feelings. Braider's contention seems in line with the dynamic implicit in aesthetic experience for Kant, that feelings prompt or even demand a language responding to them, though in Kant the scene of pedagogy is sometimes internalized, as a kind of tribunal of the mind, with one faculty of mind prodding another. Braider recalls for us, somewhat in the mode of Kant, that the sublime does indeed find its *vocation* not in the moment of failure, enthrallment, dislocation, transport, or disarticulation but in the telos of the making-sense of what had momentarily precluded it. It is the *après coup* that defines the *coup* for what it is/was.

21. Braider rehearses a disparate canon of sublime possibilities from Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Benjamin's parable about theology and historical materialism that inaugurates the "Theses on the Concept of History," all of which he opposes to that singular voice of the anti-sublime: David Hume. Whereas Hume might now and then acknowledge an instance of the sublime (the literary Ajax, for example), he is officially opposed to the discourse of the sublime to the extent that, as Braider says, "the sublime just *is* metaphysics." Braider also contends, of the sublime, that "people only start feeling it, or at any rate only start claiming they feel it, in moments of generalized crisis of faith." There may be some counter-examples (Auerbach, in a neglected essay, could talk about various medieval sublimes when a generalized crisis of faith was not at all operative[12]) but Braider certainly points us to an important aspect of the sublime's profile in the Enlightenment. Yet even Hume, who certainly participated in and helped cause a "crisis of faith" turns out, despite being an anti-sublime thinker, to embody for Boswell a serene, dignified sublimity when the philosopher is on his death bed, without any ‘faith' to comfort him. The great philosopher of a certain subjectivity (as in Deleuze's understanding) has gone beyond the petty confines of his single self. It's a teachable moment.

22. Braider's adducing of a famous passage from Benjamin, the first of the "Theses on the Concept of History," is perhaps the most counter-intuitive example from his wide array of sublime instances. Not featuring a volcano or an abyss, it is a brief, abstract allegory featuring a puppet in Turkish attire, an apparent automaton capable of defeating any opponent in the chess game—of history, presumably. One reason it makes sense for Braider to invoke this extreme little story is that it crucially engages the relation of the material to the spiritual (or at least what is beyond the senses) so central to the discourse and perhaps the experience of the sublime. The automaton wins every game because the puppet called ‘historical materialism' has his hands guided by a wizened hunchback named theology. Braider acknowledges that "theology is by no means an unequivocally pejorative term" for Benjamin, though he thinks that Benjamin is "sneering at" theology's "grotesquely wizened shape." My own sense is that Benjamin is referring rather to the unwarranted dismissal of theology, to the fact that it is sneered at by, among others, any number of materialists with feet of clay.[13] It is the striking, if complicated, collaboration of historical materialism and theology that wins the game of history, having joined the forces of spirit and material so often thought to be opposed. And the cunning of Benjamin's reason places theology in the supposedly subordinated position, slave to the master, only to have it revealed

later to be the master from the start. The sublime can have it all, and perhaps *only* the sublime can have it all, in its relentless self-totalizing, well charted by Braider, even as it or after it experiences a profound kind of failure.

23. Braider's essay is valuable for the way it refuses to be held hostage by the inherited terms of the tradition or, more precisely, by all that accompanies these terms. To think the sublime, whose discourse, even just in Longinus, appears torn between imagining it as teachable (the how-to side of Longinus) and unteachable (since it seems to require genius or momentary, unbidden enthrallment), we have to be willing to unlearn what we think we know, a difficult task but all the more necessary in the face of the most bewildering mode of the aesthetic. One has to try to be truthful to the experience of the sublime, now and again. A salutary effect, and I take it one of the points of Braider's wide range of examples, in and out of Romanticism, is to suggest that there are more modes of the sublime than have been dreamt of in Kant's philosophy and in a good deal of Romantic criticism. We need a supple, flexible discourse of the sublime that does not necessarily bring with it a whole host of values once, but no longer, taken for granted.

24. The vexed transition from the material to the spiritual, in Kant and even via Saint Paul in the landmark distinction for Christianity between the letter and the spirit, is at the center of Deborah White's articulation—on the face of it, unlikely—of the university and the sublime in her searching reading of a number of Derrida's texts, primarily those responding to Kant. Her starting point is Derrida's apparently non-casual invocation of "a certain terror" in the face of the intellectual trajectory of his doctoral thesis. For Derrida the prospect of not knowing where one is going can be terrifying, but it is, intellectually, really the only way to go. The figure of ‘terror' sounds like just that: a figure. Isn't it rather hyperbolic to speak of terror when one is just talking about an academic thesis, however difficult the work of thinking and writing might be? But if Derrida can say in general, notably, in *Of Grammatology* that "[t]he future can be anticipated only in the form of absolute danger,"[14] then even the future of academic work would be encompassed within that universal horizon of scariness. It does seem that other terrors (war, perhaps death) might rank so far above academic futures that the term ‘terror' would lose most or all of its force. And yet …

25. Most universities are very far removed from the cliché of the ivory tower: the image barely even applies to a dozen or two of the world's universities, the vast majority of which are public, government-supported institutions with non-elitist admissions and roughly affordable tuition. Because the university tends to be public and exposed, implicated in and responding to societal and governmental forces, it is by no means entirely a safe place. Relatively un-terrifying in physical terms and once in a while even beautiful, the university nonetheless, in Derrida's understanding and as elaborated by White, opens itself up over a certain abyss of reason, reason that posits an ideal that cannot be realized in actuality, and imagines itself a totality that cannot be grasped as a totality.

26. One reason that reason faces something like a sublime threat has simply to do with the character of language, that language itself constitutes an abyss. This is precisely how Heinrich Wölfflin, the great and rather sober art historian characterizes the word as opposed to the image:

> One apprehends (*empfinden*) a work of visual art in general as a much more determinate communication (*Mitteilung*) than the written word, for which to a much greater extent there is (always) something polysemous. Schiller would on occasion say that when he thought about the indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheit*) of linguistic expression he stood before an abyss.[15]

It's noteworthy that Wölfflin appeals to the Kantian Schiller to enlist the rhetoric of the sublime (the ‘abyss') in order to gloss the nature of language. Edmund Burke had his treatise on the sublime and the

beautiful culminate in an account of how words were the principal locus of the sublime, the place where syntax and indeterminacy could combine to intimate things of great power beyond the phenomenal, and to be far more affecting than mere images. White recalls Derrida's insistence on how language or representation has so often been perceived as a *menace* to philosophy, a discipline often in denial about its own medium of presentation. The young Walter Benjamin followed Kant's contemporary Hamann in thinking that the great lacuna of Kant's philosophy was its near-total neglect to analyze language. Indeed there is not a lot of explicit talk of it, aside from some rather perfunctory remarks in the *Anthropology*. Yet the abyss surfaces not least in Kant's thinking of the imagination from the first Critique through the third, the imagination being a faculty Kant would call, in the *Critique of Judgment*, "the faculty of representation" (*Darstellungsvermögen*). Allegorical of language insofar as it constitutes the passage from the sensible to the intellectual, to say nothing of its products often being glossed by Kant in terms of writing, the imagination is a problematic faculty for the project of the critical philosophy. Heidegger's trenchant analysis of imagination in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* suggests that it constituted an abyss (*Abgrund*) from which Kant had to step back, assigning a lot of powers to the understanding and some to reason that were initially in the bailiwick of the imagination in the first version of the first Critique. Thus Kant fully participates in the fraught engagement-cum-disavowal of language present in philosophy at least since Plato, though not always so starkly as that.

27. Yet it is the particular form that Kantian thinking takes in response to the sublime that gives White, even more clearly than Derrida, pause. White distances herself from the claims of Kant to put the sublime moment in its putatively proper place in the narrative destiny of the moral subject. One can't necessarily get there from here. Like McCarthy in her analysis of *Christabel*, White worries about the enforced narrativization of an event that can scarcely be contained in a logical (more or less vaguely Aristotelian) plot.

28. White also productively rehearses for us the importance of Derrida's insistence that ‘deconstruction' or even just thinking needs to take account of the institutional frame or setting of its topics at hand. One can't say, of course, that the sublime is merely an academic matter, but the university is one of the conspicuous loci of its thinking. One of Derrida's essays on reason and the university, "The University in the Eyes of its Pupils," was delivered at Cornell, the literally gorgeous campus in which abysses lie side by side with buildings housing professors and students dedicated to one or another practice of reason, and which, as it happens, has a distinguished tradition of thinking about the sublime. Here too, in a more than playful way, the thinking of the subject is implicated in the subject matter as it is elaborated, a relation that yields some surprising insights, not least about the sublime character of the university and its limits, for the institutional embodiment of reason is called up to think reasonably about what is by definition beyond it.

29. Of all the authors in this volume Frances Ferguson has the longest-standing commitment to the theory of education in the long eighteenth century, in addition to having written one of the handful of essential books on the sublime. Of late devoting more of her attention to the question of education, she is as well primed as anyone to tackle both sides of the equation, which turns out not to be an equation.

30. Ferguson would not be alone in thinking, as we noted at the outset, that the sublime and education are, in numerous respects, poles apart. When Plato's cave-dwellers crawl up to the real light and have their heads turned violently around by the sudden enlightenment they have undergone, that is a rather exceptional scenario in the history of education and in thinking about it. Sure, students and the odd professor have moments of illumination and maybe even an epiphany or two, but those moments are exceptions to the rule (of the rule) of education. In Ferguson's informed account of the (largely opposed) temporalities of education and the sublime, education seems closer to the model of gradual, incremental progress of knowledge and modes of thinking. The sublime, as we have been taught partly

by Ferguson in her earlier studies, is far more a matter of the moment and tends, as in Burke's influential version, to entail a subject something like a man in his early maturity, not too old to be jaded by experience, not too young to have his almost consolidated self elevated by aesthetically distanced terror.

31. The sublime and education do nonetheless sometimes meet or touch up against each other when one considers the character of relations to power, freedom, and morality, to say nothing of God or the divine, especially in the mode of providential force. Ferguson recalls for us the usually too blithely cited peroration from the end of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflect on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*." Note that Kant doesn't just refer to *his* mind but *the* mind, as if everyone would come to his same conclusion were she or he to reflect on the same matters. Yet it can't be empirically true that everyone has the same admiration as Kant for the moral law within. Kant, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, considers "personality" to be sublime (and not just great men!), "personality" being the locus of freedom and the seat of the moral law within. It's interesting that the sublime, for Kant, and even more so for his disciple Schiller, takes what appears to be a matter having precisely nothing to do with freedom, because of the violent incontrollable force of the source of awe (a volcano, a great epic, or whatever), and converts it into a source of the self's assertion of its own power, the exercise of its freedom to think, and to think beyond the realm of the senses. But the slow burn of education can accomplish something of the same: a more or less forced regime of learning that sets free the child or even (according to Ferguson's interesting emphasis on Barbauld) the adult.

32. For better or for worse, both the sublime and education, in many accounts, have the effect of lifting the individual beyond herself or himself to the transcendental or something like it. Hence, the figure of God (or someone or something like him, if indeed there can be anything *like* god) that pops up in so many accounts of both. Burke omitted God from the first edition of his *Philosophical Enquiry* even though, at one level, God fit rather neatly in with kings and other lofty figures culled from the pages of Milton, Shakespeare, and Homer. Barbauld in her educational scheme wants to harmonize nature, education, and God, seeing a providential force operating at all times, though this gets her into some logical and other problems regarding actually existing religions, to say nothing of the fact that providence's trumping of all individual decisions risks rendering the whole project moot. Nonetheless her faith in society to correct itself, providentially, is not shaken. Attention to the world outside the self should do the trick for any subject supposed to know or be in the process of knowing. Yet Ferguson can rightly show that education presented for Barbauld "the same sort of problems that sublimity had for Burke," namely the compromise of individual freedom—the very value so prized by so many late eighteenth-century theorists of education (of various political persuasions). Providence makes choices look like pseudo-choices rather in the way that sublime violence makes ‘freedom' look like pseudo-freedom, no matter what the self tells itself.

33. Officially, Jeremy Bentham, on whom Ferguson is one of the best contemporary readers (not least because she actually *reads* him), is an atheist and thus far removed from Barbauld's providentialism. Critics like to find crypto-theistic structures in his work, as in the Panopticon writings (which seems to be about all most people read by Bentham—or read about—these days, an unfortunate legacy of Foucault's influential analysis). But Ferguson stresses Bentham's concerted attempt to rein things in to the realm of the finite, especially when it's a matter of practical matters.[16]

34. Kant emerges as something like the dialectical *Aufhebung* of Barbauld and Bentham, with one fixed firmly on the transcendental and the other on the pragmatics of everyday life. It is in the thinking of Kant that the sublime and education seem to connect most profoundly insofar as moral judgment or the capacity to be moral is central to both, and it's of some interest that the dynamics of both turn crucially

on examples. In both domains the singularity of the example leads to the moral: in the sublime, to the (increased) capacity to be a moral being, via the articulation of imagination with reason, and in education via the exercise of moral judgment. Despite the finitude of the examples, the dynamics of judgment lead in both domains to the infinite. As we saw in Ferguson's invocation of the famous passage about "the starry heavens above and the moral law within," the Kantian person is the site of an infinite subjectivity (not unlike that of Descartes and of Hegel but differently textured) whose profile is that of moral judgment. And the good exercise of moral judgment, as is clear in the long example Ferguson cites from the second Critique, prompts our amazement and admiration. In Kant, perhaps more than in any other thinker, we witness the unlikely combination of the sublime and education, and the most powerful entanglement of their endless provocations.

Notes

1 Derrida cannot be pinned down to one historical period of interest or expertise, though it would be hard to overestimate the importance of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel for his thinking. On Derrida and Romanticism, see two issues of *Studies in Romanticism* 46:2 and 46:3 (Summer and Fall 2007), both edited by David L. Clark.

2 The rediscovery of Longinus launched by Boileau's translation (1674) marks the sublime of European modernity as initially a Baroque event, even if its full-fledged philosophical treatment comes at the end of or after the Baroque as understood in terms of most periodizing schemes.

3 Explicit discourse about the sublime, however, postdates the experience or performance of it. That the sublime was not a prominent category in Milton's time did nothing to prevent him from writing what many would consider the most sublime poem in the English language. Samuel Johnson (when the category was much in fashion) thought sublimity to be the defining characteristic of his poetry.

4 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997), 194ff.

5 Christopher Braider notes most pointedly the conjunction of related terms *Bestimmung* (vocation, determination), *Stimmung* (mood, sentiment) and one could add *Stimme* (voice) not least in Kant where the remarkable thing about feelings in the experience of the beautiful and the sublime is how quickly they get translated into or at least prompt verbal judgments of the sort "X is beautiful," "Y is sublime," even if Kant specifies that one cannot properly call anything sublime.

6 For the classic analysis of this, see Neil Hertz's superb essay "A Reading of Longinus," in his *The End of the Line* (New York: Columbia, 1985) or in the new expanded edition of that book (Aurora, Co.: The Davies Group, 2009).

7 For Paul de Man's analysis of this "complicated and somewhat devious scenario," see "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," in his *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 86.

8 In this McCarthy runs parallel to Siane Ngai's explorations of what she calls "stuplimity" in her *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2005) and earlier in Sianne Ngai, "Stuplimity: Shock and Boredom in Twentieth-Century Aesthetics," *Postmodern Culture* 10.2 (January 2000) un-paginated.

9 See Nicholas Halmi: "From Hierarchy to Opposition: Allegory and the Sublime," *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 4: 337-60; Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1964), esp. 243-252; Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 47 *inter alia*.

10 Shelley is distinctive for not insisting on a Burkean, or early Kantian, sharp distinction between the beautiful and the sublime —not everyone would be able to invoke "awful Loveliness" the way he does— because the intensity of the experience of beauty easily tips over into its supposed opposite or quasi-opposite.

11 In a good deal of ‘sublime' European art one sees an insistence on this pointing motif, from Leonardo's "St. John the Baptist" to Jacques-Louis David's "Napoleon crossing the Alps."

12 Auerbach, Erich. "Camilla, or, The Rebirth of the Sublime." In *Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Pantheon, 1965), 181-234.

13 I broached a reading of this thesis and the "Theses" more generally in "Reversal, Quotation (Benjamin's History)," in *MLN* (*Modern Language Notes*), German Issue, (April 1991), 622-45.

14 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. [Corrected Edition] (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 5.

15 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kleine Schriften* (1886-1933), ed. Joseph Gantner (Basel: Benno Schwabe & Co, 1946), 165.

16 It's not as if Bentham, however anti-sublime like Hume, is a pure empiricist of the sensual. In his thinking on language, for example, he emphasizes the pressing need for names for "immaterial or pneumatical objects," even if they all have their roots in materiality.