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Teletrauma

Distance in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry**

This paper seeks to trace the notion of distance in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, by first indicating how the critical distance between Burke and Kant can be rethought in terms of an intrapersonal distance within both; then, as a second move, by looking at Burke's general theory of the passions as it differs from that of Locke; and thirdly, by moving to the more specific question of how the passion of fear or terror is related to both pain and the sublime – an investigation which in turn necessitates a focus on the way attention figures as a duplicitous shifter between an-aesthesia and suffering. Interestingly enough, while Burke conceptualizes the sublime as a passion based on mediation or distance, and therefore distinguishes it from “simple” fear, later it turns out that fear itself is far from being a “simple” notion for immediacy, since immediate danger or threat still presupposes a mere apprehension of pain, rather than pure pain itself. This double distance (between fear and the sublime, as well as between fear and pain), puts fear in an intermediate position, which is more traumatic than that of the sublime, but which contains an element of distance with relation to pain, and is therefore a form of “teletrauma,” an amalgam of an-aesthesia and suffering. Being thus positioned between the sublime and pain, fear appears as the site of contamination, where detachment and involvement merge. In this respect, it may serve as a conceptual tool for a critical rethinking of the problematic nature of both aesthetic distance and perceptual immediacy.

The history of philosophy is often rendered as a multi-linear narrative, whose individual storylines are made up of different conceptions following upon one another through a logic of negation. Conceptions included in the narrative are supposed to mark important stages in the development of philosophical thought. It is precisely their capacity for a critical distance from preceding conceptions which earns them a

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place in the narrative. The history of 18th-century aesthetics is patterned much the same way. As far as Edmund Burke's aesthetic treatise (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757/59), and more specifically, its general theory of the passions, is concerned, the text clearly indicates the point of reference from which the author wishes to distance himself: the ultimate target is John Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690), whose ideas are criticized at several points in Burke's discourse. At the same time, however, the person negating inevitably turns into the one *being* negated, when about three decades later, in a seminal section of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant names Burke as a major precedent not simply to be honoured but, more importantly, to be critically surpassed.

While the Locke–Burke–Kant lineage is certainly a cliché among historians of aesthetics, oversimplifying the otherwise non-linear and rather complex network of interrelations both in the sources and the reception of Burke's *Enquiry* (involving Le Brun, Du Bos, Addison, Hume, Shaftesbury, Baillie, Diderot, Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Herder, among others), it still may serve demonstrative purposes with regard to the notion of distance and the logic of distancing.

Burke/Kant

Kant's polite but highly resolute gesture of distancing himself from Burke is something of a common-place, but it still makes one ponder for at least two reasons. It deserves scrutiny, because, on the one hand, both Burke's and Kant's argument centres on the idea (or rather, the hardly granted possibility) of distancing or distanciation, and, on the other, because such seemingly interpersonal relations are not necessarily limited to connections between two persons.

One could argue, for instance, that the same displacement (from empiricism to transcendental philosophy), which appears as an interpersonal difference between Burke and Kant, could in fact be discerned within Kant himself as a passage from so-called "precritical" to "critical" philosophy. In this respect, Kant's biographic reference to Burke is but the projection of an *autobiographical* relationship, as if the sage of Prussia rejected, in the image of his Irish colleague, his own younger self (the naïve thrust of his own *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, 1764), and as if this gesture of out-placement was needed precisely because the autobiographical relation might make the distancing much more difficult. According to the logic of autobiography, every negation must be a *determinate* negation (as Hegel tells us) since the negated element determines its own negative. And since the negative (as a determinate negative) is an heir to, or survival of, the very element it negates, the latter will ceaselessly haunt it, as one of the readers of the Kantian

sublime has shown. Jean-François Lyotard claims that, with respect to the passions, Kant is “closely following Burke,” and “no matter what he says,” his conception of the sublime as a “negative pleasure” (*negative Lust*) is but an echo of the Burkean concept of “delight.”¹

The need for critical distancing, within an autobiographical relation, also emerges with reference to Burke’s own career, whenever his “early” aesthetic speculations are contemplated, following Burke’s own suggestions, from the perspective of his “late” contributions to political philosophy. This kind of approach is often accompanied by the conclusion (or rather, the presupposition) that the boyish carelessness and radicalism of the *Philosophical Enquiry* is corrected, as it were, by the mature and deep historical wisdom of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and that thus, in his later years, Burke distances himself, however implicitly, from extremist and revolutionary modes of thought inspired by the sublime. Somewhat less frequent and therefore more remarkable are readings, which – inverting the direction of criticism – analyze the *Reflections* from the perspective of the *Enquiry*, submitting to aesthetic analysis his political discourse. Even less frequently, however, does one encounter readings which do not place these two works on a seesaw, praising the one by blaming the other, but rather, uncover different and less distinct relations between them, which are more cumbersome to articulate, but perhaps more promising in their heuristic potentialities.

Since *critical* distance (both along biographical or autobiographical terms) is in fact just another name for the kind of *aesthetic* distance (distanciation or negativity) Burke and, of course, Kant is talking about, it seems highly practical, if not wholly necessary, for any effort at circumscribing the critical position of the *Enquiry*, to consider how the notion of distance is inscribed into Burke’s aesthetics. As we shall see, this inscription is far from being a simple or single one, it is rather multiple or multi-layered, which produces a level of complexity high enough to be worthy of a sustained analysis. It is the element of distance which distinguishes the concepts of pain, fear, and the sublime – with fear functioning as a point of articulation dividing as well as connecting pain and sublimity, thereby pointing toward a broader conceptual field, which offers a somewhat less common conception of the passions through the twin concepts of tension and attention. It is these five notions (pain, fear, and the sublime, on the one hand, and tension and attention, on the other), along which the route of my argument will evolve.

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Kant’s ‘Critique of Judgment,’ §§23–29), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 24 and 68.

Locke/Burke

In order to accurately trace the distinctions between pain, fear, and the sublime, and to shed light upon the role played by distance in drawing these distinctions, we first need to get a somewhat detailed picture of the properly Burkean general conception of the passions, paying special attention to elements which mark a move away from the Lockean scheme.

The general theory of the passions, spelled out in Part 1 of Burke's discourse, has a double function: *retrospectively*, it continues the project of Longinus, whose fragmented rhetorical treatise breaks off precisely with the promise of an investigation of the passions,² while at the same time it *prospectively* lays down the conceptual fundamentals, which are supposed to allow for a sophisticated analysis of the categories Burke himself is about to develop (notably, those of the beautiful and the sublime). Burke outlines the passions according to two different schemes: one could be called "structural," and the other "thematic." As opposed to the latter, "thematic" division, which groups the passions either under the heading of self-preservation, or that of society (subsuming the sublime into the former, and the beautiful into the latter group), what we need to pay attention to at the moment is the other division, the one I called "structural," since that is where the element of distance acquires a key role, as part of a debate with Locke.

Having underlined, in the very first section, the importance of novelty in evoking intense passions, Burke attempts, in the next four sections, to question the popular Lockean idea that pleasure and pain are passions emerging from one another: "Mr. Locke . . . thinks that the removal or lessening of a pain is considered and operates as a pleasure, and the loss or diminishing of pleasure as a pain. It is this opinion which we consider here" (34 [1.3]).³ The Lockean conception under consideration here presupposes a tightly closed economy of the passions, insofar as

2. All parenthetical references are to this edition: Longinus, "On the Sublime," trans. W. H. Fyfe, rev. by Donald Russell, in Aristotle, *Poetics*; Longinus, *On the Sublime*; Demetrius, *On Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). In fact, Longinus' treatise does not merely promise the discussion of the passions, of which the author plans to write in a "separate treatise" (307 [44]), but already signals their place among the congenital sources of the sublime (181 [8]), sporadically discusses them (185–225 [9–15]), while at the same time he also warns us that a passionate state is not in itself equivalent to sublimity (169–171 [3]).

3. All parenthesized references are to the following edition: Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); this is a re-edition, with a revised introduction, of the 1958 critical edition of the *Enquiry*, also edited by Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 219 (II.21.16).

any increase in either of the two basic passions is imaginable only in correlation to an equal decrease in the opposite passion, following the logic of expenditure and income.⁴ Just as one man's income is another man's expenditure, the emergence or intensification of any of the two basic passions can occur only with the simultaneous disappearance or weakening of its counterpart. For Burke, however, passions are subject to a certain amortization or erosion, they get worn with the passage of time (just as coins), without inducing any increase, i.e. any compensation, on the opposite side. The basic form of their emergence is likewise asymmetrical, and in that sense an-economic (just as the minting of coins), since they are in no way, in their occurrence, bound to the partial or full diminishing of their opposites. This is why in their basic form both pleasure and pain are independent, i.e. "positive," passions. Their positivity resides precisely in their capacity not to emerge from the negation of their opposites:

Pain and pleasure are simple ideas, incapable of definition. People are not liable to be mistaken in their feelings, but they are very frequently wrong in the names they give them, and in their reasonings about them. Many are of opinion, that pain arises necessarily from the removal of some pleasure; as they think pleasure does from the ceasing or diminution of some pain. For my part I am rather inclined to imagine, that pain and pleasure in their most simple and natural manner of affecting, are each of a positive nature, and by no means necessarily dependent on each other for their existence. The human mind is often, and I think it is for the most part, in a state neither of pain nor pleasure, which I call a state of indifference. (32 [1.2])

Burke questions the economic relationship between the passions under investigation. An increase in pain does not necessarily imply a decrease in pleasure, just as the intensification of pleasure does not involve the lessening of pain. While, for Locke, the total sum of the passions (of pleasure and pain) was at all times constant (according to a principle of passion conservation, as it were), in the Burkean framework, passions can both appear and disappear – an-economically. Once passions can be inscribed or erased similarly to the minting or abrasion of coins, a moment

4. A similar economy is present already in the very concept of "passion" as it is conceived by Aristotle or Descartes, insofar as passion (*pathos*) is thought to be the "passive" correlative of an active impression according to some principle of energy conservation. See Aristotle's treatise *On the Soul*: "all sense-perception is a process of being . . . affected" (424a [II.11]), trans. J. A. Smith (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.html>). Descartes opens his discourse on *The Passions of the Soul* with the same idea, as he starts out from the co-determination of passion and action; see René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 18–19.

of violence enters Locke's system. This is how, in their basic form, both pleasure and pain can be considered as "positive" (in other words, "simple," "independent," or "unrelated") sensations, provided that positivity is by no means a category of value, but refers rather to the structural necessity of a moment of violence.

But to be able to introduce the concept of positivity, and thereby distinguish independent (i.e. positive) from relative (i.e. negative) pleasure or pain, Burke first has to introduce a third state of mind, which does not exist in the Lockean scheme. And this is what he calls "indifference," a state of tranquillity or apathy.⁵ It is only with relation to such a state, that any notion of positive pleasure or pain makes sense, the reason being that these sensations do not emerge through the negation of their opposites, but rather appear through a move away from the neutral state of tranquillity, also returning to that state when they vanish. The other passions, which emerge through the negation of their opposites (and are therefore "negative"⁶), are given individual names for the sake of clarity: relative pleasure will be called "delight," whereas relative pain will be called "disappointment" or "grief."⁷ Once these names are established, the basic forms of the passions can be referred to without the constant use of word "positive," by calling them simply pleasure and pain.

Thus, with the insertion of the hypostatized state of indifference, Locke's dichotomous system (pleasure/pain) is extended to involve five elements: beside indifference Burke develops the categories of positive pleasure and positive pain, as well as those of negative pleasure (i.e. delight) and negative pain (i.e. disappointment or grief).

5. In fact, a very similar notion, that of *indifferency*, does exist in Locke's terminology, but it appears in a different context, attached to the notion of liberty, and does not bear on his own conceptualization of the passions of pain and pleasure in any significant way (see Locke, pp. 257–259 [II.21.71]). The notion of indifference plays a more important role in the early Greek hedonist school of the Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus of Cyrene, who held that sensations can be subsumed into the three categories of pleasure, pain, and indifference, depending on whether the impulse is gentle, violent, or calm.

6. This adjective makes its appearance only in the Introduction (18) to the second edition of the *Enquiry* in 1759, where it appears in apposition to "indirect." In the main text, Burke keeps speaking of "relative" pleasure or pain throughout. For Kant, the notion of negativity informs the concept of "negative pleasure" as well as that of "negative exhibition," see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), pp. 98 (cf. p. 129) and 135.

7. The distinction between the two forms of relative pain is drawn in terms of the temporary or final nature of loss: in the case of disappointedness, there is still hope to recuperate the pleasurable object, whereas grief is a state of mourning over an irreversible loss (cf. 37 [1.5]).

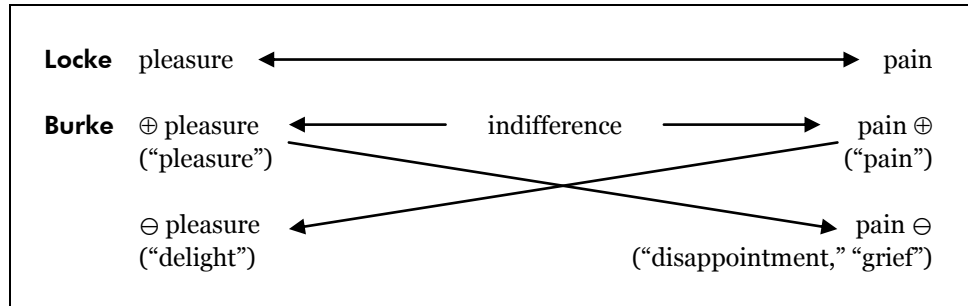


Diagram 1

Since the whole Burkean system is based upon the insertion of the category of indifference (for it is that very insertion that generates the disjunction of the positive and negative levels), the status of that category seems crucial. One could easily take it as a metaphysical postulate that has to be granted hypothetically for the matrix to evolve. From later passages in the treatise, however, we might get the impression that there is a different consideration in the background.

For when in Part 3 Burke briefly returns to this concept, he provides an account, which suggests that the state of indifference is by no means a supra-historical state, given by nature, but is indeed a historical formation, a product of custom or use:

For as use at last takes off the painful effect of many things, it reduces the pleasurable effect in others in the same manner, and brings both to a sort of mediocrity and indifference. Very justly is use called a second nature; and our natural and common state is one of absolute indifference, equally prepared for pain or pleasure. (104 [3.5])

Indifference is nothing but a faded or worn passion, which has lost its power due to the repetition of the affect, and can therefore appear as a "second nature," in the ideological mask of naturalness (just like the dead metaphors that Nietzsche likens to worn coins).⁸ Strangely enough, Burke speaks of "absolute" indifference in the

8. This notion appears in fact at the very beginning of the *Enquiry*, when emphasizing the importance of novelty Burke describes repetition's negative effect on effectiveness: "the same things make frequent returns, and they return with less and less of any agreeable effect" (31 [1.1]). A similar description of repetition had been offered a decade before by John Baillie, in his "Essay on the Sublime" (1747): "Admiration, a passion always attending the sublime, arises from uncommonness, and constantly decays as the object becomes more and more familiar" (John Baillie, "An Essay on the Sublime," in *The Sublime: A Reader in British*

passage just quoted, while his perspective sheds light precisely on the fact that this indifference is anything but absolute: behind its apparent naturalness historical contingency is hard at work. Thus, it cannot be taken as a state “absolved” from all historical reference. Since Burke conceives the passions in their historical formation, his passion theory has in fact history as its latent object.

Pain, Fear, and the Sublime

The above system of the passions, so symmetrical in terms of structure, is determined by a double asymmetry. Firstly, the categories of the beautiful and the sublime are both situated on the side of pleasure – the beautiful being subsumed into the rubric of positive pleasure, while the sublime into the rubric of negative pleasure (or delight).⁹ The categories of positive and negative pain are clearly left empty, as if Burke had nothing to say either of actual pain, or of relative pain deriving from the temporary or final loss of the source of pleasure. Secondly, he attributes greater intensity to pain, than to pleasure,¹⁰ so the passion turning on positive pain, that is, the passion of the sublime as negative pleasure, comes to the fore due to its sheer force, as opposed to the passion of the beautiful as positive pleasure.¹¹ The latter

Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory, ed. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 91).

9. Burke connects the beautiful (i.e. positive pleasure) to the feeling of love: “By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it” (91 [3.1]); “the beautiful is founded on a mere positive pleasure, and excites in the soul that feeling, which is called love” (160 [4.25]). If the beautiful implies the intimate immediacy of love, then the sublime feeling of respect (i.e. negative pleasure) might be considered as a sort of tele-love, in which the threatening object is always respected “at a distance” (111 [3.10]). According to Burke, we relate to objects of love by looking down on what is weaker than us, and to the objects of respect by looking up to what is stronger (65–67 [2.5]). The same attitude manifests itself, in relation to the sexes, in the love for (weak) women and the respect for (strong) men, while in relation to generations, it appears as a cordial kindness toward grandparents and a reverence toward parents. From the juxtaposition of these two areas (the sexes and the generations) it becomes clear that a mother cannot be a “parent,” and a grandfather cannot be a “man” (111 [3.10]). For Burke, mothers are per definition girls, and grandfathers are per definition castrated.

10. In this, he is following Locke: “pleasure operates not so strongly on us, as pain” (Locke, p. 218 [II.20.14]).

11. Just noting: it is by no means necessary to follow Burke in his zeal for the sublime. In a certain respect, his concept of beauty is just as, if not even more, thought-provoking. From the perspective of theatricality, one could easily show that the conception of the beautiful leads us to steeper slopes than those the sublime could ever reach, precisely because, unlike sublime “precipices” which at least give us a chance to locate and evade them, beautiful

asymmetry is replicated in the thematic division of the passions, privileging the passions of self-preservation over those of society.

As a result of these two kinds of asymmetry, Burke's structurally balanced scheme begins to slope, as it were, toward its lower left corner, to the rubric of negative pleasure. And since that point can, in turn, be reached only from the diametrically opposite corner of positive pain, it comes as little surprise that later on Burke's attention is aimed primarily at that movement, the transition from pain to the sublime. This is what happens when in the recapitulatory discussion of the passions concerning self-preservation he writes the following:

The passions which belong to self-preservation, turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances . . . Whatever excites this delight, I call *sublime*.
(51 [1.18]; Burke's emphasis)

The force of the sublime derives from its connection to pain, while its capacity to cause pleasure implies a mediated relation, a spatial or temporal detachment. It is in such a context that, at an earlier phase, the element of distance enters Burke's argument:

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain *distances*, and with certain *modifications*, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.
(40 [1.7]; my emphases)

The juxtaposition of the notions of "distance" and "modification" might suggest an interpretation of the former as a strictly spatial notion (as distance *per se* in the narrow sense), and the latter as a temporal concept. Yet, it seems more likely that within the Burkean lexicon "distance" is meant both in a spatial and temporal

"slopes" are more difficult to cope with, because their seductive gravity is less discernible. At one point, Burke himself acknowledges that the alleged weakness of women, which generates their beauty, is not without a certain theatrical performativity (110 [3.9]), one which is intricately related to the "deceitful maze" of the female body considered as a surface which captures the male gaze precisely with the "easy and insensible" variation of its forms (115 [3.15]). Burke formulates his insight in a concluding question: "Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface *continual and yet hardly perceptible at any point* which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?" (115 [3.15]; my emphasis). To confine myself to a single comment: change is hard to perceive *precisely because* it is continual. – I am trying to take steps in this direction in the framework of another essay, on "Terror(ism) and Theatricality," focusing on Burke and specific segments of contemporary theory.

sense,¹² while the concept of “modification” refers to the concomitant change in the modality or intensity of the passion, as when he speaks of the “modifications of pain” (38 [1.5]).

Although the word “safety” appears only once in the discourse, in a relatively late and by no means strategic argument about Locke’s opinion concerning blackness (143 [4.14]), the *notion* of safety seems highly important for Burke, since distance is first and foremost a *safe* distance, whether it is reached in terms of time or space. This is true even though Burke insists that our safety (he uses the word “immunity”) is only a prerequisite for our delight, and by no means its ultimate cause (48 [1.14]).¹³

12. This reading can be supported by other passages in Part 1, where a similar notion of distance is present without any reference to the difference between spatial or temporal aspects: delight is defined as “the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger” (37 [1.4]), implying that one’s life is “out of any imminent hazard” (48 [1.15]), in other words, that we can perceive the terrifying object “without danger” (50 [1.17]).

In contrast to Burke’s rendering, a clearly spatial notion of distance is present in Joseph Addison’s lexicon, where the word appears as the spatial counterpart of temporal detachment: “we are delighted with the reflecting upon dangers that are *past*, or looking on a precipice at a *distance*” (*The Spectator* 418 [Monday, June 30, 1712; my emphases]). While Addison’s emphasis on “safety” contains no explicit reference to a distinction between temporal and spatial detachment (“the more frightful appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the sense of our own safety,” *The Spectator* 418), from a later formulation one may nevertheless have the impression that spatial distance may in certain situations prove to be “too close” as compared to temporal (or representational) detachment: “we are not capable of receiving [delight], when we see a person actually under the tortures that we meet with in a description; because, in this case, the object presses too close upon our senses” (*The Spectator* 418). One could say that, for Addison, “live” (as opposed to “recorded”) suffering does not allow for sublime delight, no matter how safe (i.e. spatially distanced) spectators are. Burke makes no such restrictions when he considers the difference between actual vs. represented suffering (either authentic or fictitious). For him, “terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close” (46 [1.14]), and distance (even in cases of “live,” i.e. spatially mediated, suffering) certainly implies that the object of terror does *not* press “too close.”

13. Just as Burke (and Addison), Kant also lays emphasis on the key element of safety in the experience of the sublime. The Burkean notion of “immunity” is smoothly translated into Kant’s idea of “resistance” (*Widerstand*). What is, however, unique about the Kantian conception is the way he splits the very concept of fear into two crucially different concepts, distinguishing sublime fear (fear from a safe distance) from panic fear (fear without safety). To fear God is sublime, but to fear “of” God has nothing sublime about it: “Thus a virtuous person fears God without being afraid of him [*So fürchtet der Tugendhafte Gott, ohne sich vor ihm zu fürchten*].” This conceptual distinction prefigures another one, to be introduced a

More important for our purposes is the fact that the two passages cited above do not resemble merely in their common emphasis on safe distance (spatial or temporal), but also because of a rather disturbing circumstance, one to which interpreters of these otherwise much quoted formulations have paid little attention so far. For, if we dare ask the hardly unimportant question, from what exactly we have to distance ourselves, Burke's text gives a surprisingly vague answer. For neither of the two passages mentions only pain (or rather, the necessity to distance oneself from pain), but both make mention of danger as well (and of the necessity to move away from danger) – even though they do so in different ways: in a different word order and with different conjunctives, the first one saying, “pain *and* danger,” the second one, “danger *or* pain.”¹⁴ But it is far from clear how danger (and the fear or terror evoked by it) is related to pain, since the two different conjunctives (“and” and/or “or”) can mean both the difference and sameness of the conjoined elements, and thus the conjunctives themselves can be both different and identical in relation to each other. The question remains therefore, how pain is related to danger (the sensation of pain to the sense of danger), and how the feeling of sublimity is related to both, whether from the same distance, or not. To answer this question is tantamount to trying to explain why Burke can claim, first, that without distancing the source of the passion would be “simply painful,”¹⁵ and, second, that it would affect us as something “simply terrible.” Are pure pain and pure terror one and the same sensation, or are they different? And, whatever their relation, are they indeed simply “simple”?

The answer comes at a much later point in the discourse, since the general theoretical matrix of the passions sketched out in Part 1 does actually not spell out the relation between pain and fear. That is exactly what happens, however, at the beginning of Part 4, where Burke's focus is expressly directed on the difference between these two passions. He examines the similarity and difference between pain

few pages later, between religion and superstition. The Kantian sublimation of fear into sublime or religious fear (fearing God *without* fearing “of” God, *Gott fürchten ohne sich vor Gott zu fürchten*, to put it succinctly) presupposes that the person fearing is at a safe distance from the threat of God's will. As Kant puts it, he “does not think of wanting to resist God and his commandments as a possibility that should worry *him*” (or, in relation to natural disasters: “provided we are in a safe place [*Sicherheit*]”). See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 120; *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 184–85.

14. In fact, the same oscillation is present within the latter section itself, as it opens with a definition of the sublime in terms of “pain, and danger,” only to underline later, in the passage I quoted, the necessary distance from “danger or pain” (39–40 [1.7]).

15. The notion of a “simply painful” effect also returns later in the discourse (see 46 [1.14], and 85 [2.21]).

and fear in the framework of an argument, whose prime objective is to trace the efficient causes of the sublime – an investigation to be repeated later (in the second half of the same part) with regard to the beautiful. In Part 4, Burke defines fear as “an apprehension of pain or death” (131 [4.3]), exactly the same way he defined it two parts earlier, in Part 2, in the second section on terror (57 [2.2]). Fear (or, in its extreme form, terror) appears in both places as the sensation of a sensation, as an “apprehension,” or misgivings, the presentiment of the sentiment of pain.¹⁶ In the state of fear only the idea of pain is present to us, the very pain itself, which we try to evade, is deferred to the future. Thus, there can be no doubt that fear itself is already at a certain (albeit unsafe) distance from pain, so when Burke places the feeling of the sublime not only beyond pure pain, but also beyond pure fear, he in fact puts it at a double remove from actual suffering, suggesting that distance does not necessarily imply safety, but can just as well be a dangerous distance.

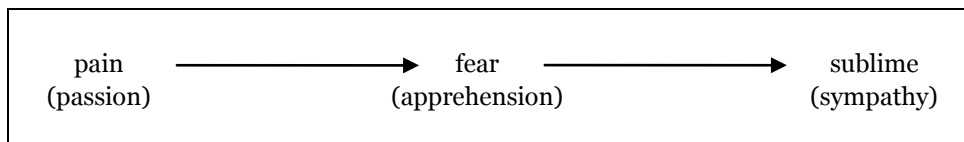


Diagram 2

According to the logic of this double remove, the sublime is conceived as a distance from a distance. But since the distance to be distanced is an unsafe or dangerous one, there is no guarantee that the secondary distance from this unsafe distance will produce safety. Rather, what is implied is that any effort at distancing from an un-

16. The most recent German translation of the *Enquiry* translates “apprehension” as *Sorge* (concern or worry); see Edmund Burke, *Philosophische Untersuchung über den Ursprung unserer Ideen vom Erhabenen und Schönen*, trans. Friedrich Bassenge (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), pp. 91 and 171. I mention this to open Burke’s discourse to the Heideggerian discussion of *Sorge*, either as a concern about this or that particular entity, or as concern as such without any specified object to be concerned about. This double aspect of *Sorge* could be articulated along Heidegger’s distinction between fear (*Furcht*) and anxiety (*Angst*) (see especially §68 in *Being and Time*, and more specifically, the subchapter on “The Temporality of Disposition [*Die Zeitlichkeit der Befindlichkeit*]”). While no such distinction seems to inform the Burkean definition of fear as apprehension, the disposition of anxiety is a permanent threat whenever the spectral nature of the object of fear is considered, most notably, in the potentially threatening aspects of the beautiful (see fn. 11 above). Thus, it is the very distinction of fear from anxiety which is problematic for Burke. One could conclude that it is the spectral contamination of fear and anxiety (the contamination of the two aspects of *Sorge*), which constitutes Burke’s “concern.”

safe distance will itself lead to just another level of un-safety, raising distance to the second power without any ensured move from danger to the pure absence of danger. An unsafe distance from a previous unsafe distance will never add up to safety (no matter on which arithmetic power distanciation is repeated), but will only reproduce danger on yet another level of complexity. As a result, the sublime remains in constant danger of relapsing into danger, and thus, into a state of panic fear. Sublimity is endangered by danger, safety is threatened by threat. That is how the intermediate position of danger or threat (and the attendant passion of fear or terror) gains a special critical importance.

The relation between pain and the sublime – between passion and sympathy, *pathos* and *syn-pathos*, or trauma and safety – is articulated by the intermediate state of fear, which functions as a point of articulation not only dividing the two polar positions, but also connecting them. While fear is the sentiment, or rather, presentiment (“apprehension”) of pain, it is still not “simple” pain, as it also implies a certain distance. In this respect, it is something like a distant injury or distant wounding: a teletrauma. Neither is it im-mediate pain, nor is it pure painlessness. It simultaneously involves the mediatedness or structural anaesthesia of any instances of trauma (i.e. the distance of what is near), and the disruption of our safe detachment from events occurring in other spaces or times, through some sort of tele-sensing, or telaesthetic traumatism (i.e. the nearness of what is far away). At the same time that it articulates, it also disrupts the conceptual distinction between pain and the sublime (or, passion and sympathy), and becomes the site of their spectral contamination. Being an amalgam of suffering and anaesthesia, fear may function as a critical tool undoing received notions of perceptual immediacy and aesthetic distance.¹⁷

What needs to be investigated therefore, in what remains, is why every trauma must necessarily become distant, on the one hand, and why, on the other hand, “sublimation” itself (that is, any form of seemingly intact or anaesthetized observation) must inevitably turn traumatic. Burke’s treatise has much to say about both sides of the problem. That investigation, however, must follow a different line, running along the Burkean notions of tension and attention.

A small remark, before I proceed further: my calling the contamination “spectral” a few lines above was by no means an accident. Although Burke concentrates on the transition from pain to the sublime, the problem we face here seems to be

17. On the late 18th-century conceptual history of anaesthesia (its transition from a perceptual deficiency to a medical procedure), see Steven Bruhm, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics at the Revolution,” *Studies in Romanticism* 32 (Fall 1993) 399–424. For other investigations into the conceptuality of anaesthesia (and its relation to *aesthesis* or perception), see the rich work of Odo Marquard and Wolfgang Iser.

structurally identical with the one we might face along the other, less frequently discussed axis, leading from positive pleasure to negative pain. As I have indicated earlier, the latter route goes from the feeling of pleasure to the feeling of loss, and here too an intermediate articulating element could be isolated, even if it remains concealed in the discourse, since Burke does not name it, as he names the element of fear on the other axis. We know, however, from others like Hobbes or Locke, that fear is just one of a pair of passions oriented toward the future, the other passion being hope, whose point of reference is not potential pain (*malum futurum*), but potential pleasure (*bonum futurum*). Behind this orientation toward the future, however, there lies in both passions a fundamental reference to the past, since the future is desired or feared precisely because it is connected to past experiences and is therefore coming as a return of the past: what is to come is thus a re-coming, in which the future comes about as a come-back of the past, the *avenir* as *revenant*, the future as a haunting ghost.¹⁸ Consequently, the structural resemblance of fear and hope does not simply reside in the kinship of two future-oriented passions, but implies their common spectrality as well. The moment of contamination we located on the axis leading from positive pleasure to negative pain inserts, between the pleasure of what is present and the mourning of what is lost, a state of hauntedness, in which the semi-distant (never entirely departed) thing keeps returning in the mode of the living dead. The same logic of haunting is present along the axis leading from positive pain to negative pleasure, in the state of fear, which contains a reference to pain as a returning anguish. And this is how the retro-aspect of fear and hope spectralizes the conceptual or sensual contamination taking place in each.

18. In §68 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates the classical distinction between fear and hope as follows: “Hope has been characterized in distinction from fear, which refers to a *malum futurum*, as a waiting for a *bonum futurum*” (345). In both cases, this implies the potential return, the very “repeatability” (*Wiederholbarkeit*) of former occurrences, and accordingly, the inevitable “spectrality” (*Unheimlichkeit*) of the present (343). Temporality is thus defined as a “past-presenting future” (*gewesende-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*), that is, the coming of an event which re-presents (i.e. makes present anew) that which has passed (away), and which comes therefore, in a zombie-like fashion, as a come-back of the dead. For Heidegger, this kind of temporality defines the “structure of concern” (*Sorgestruktur*) which determines human existence (350). From a previous remark, however, it is clear that this leaves open the question of the animal (which Heidegger calls the “merely-living-being”): “How the stimuli and impulses affecting the senses in a merely-living-being [*in einem Nur-Lebendem*] are to be defined ontologically, how and where the existence of animals, for example, is constituted through ‘time,’ remains a specific problem” (346). Parenthetical references to Heidegger’s *Being and Time* are to the following edition: Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001); English translations are mine.

Tension and Attention

Burke also argues that the difference between pain and fear is a difference in degree, rather than being a purely qualitative leap. This idea already appears in the above mentioned passage from the section on terror in Part 2, when he says: “fear being an apprehension of pain or death, *it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain*” (57 [2.2]; my emphasis). It won’t be until Part 4, however, that we get a more detailed account and a selection of demonstrative examples for this resemblance. There, Burke brings the examples of a man under torment and a dog terrified by the apprehension of physical punishment.¹⁹ Thus, the relation between pain and fear comes to be demonstrated by examples for human pain and animal fear. By juxtaposing these specific instances, Burke does not only problematize the difference between pain and fear (in other words, actual or present pain and imaginary or future pain), but willy-nilly also questions the received notion of a hierarchy between human and animal modes of sense-perception (their different sensitivities to space and time). So, before citing the passage in question, some preliminary remarks must be made.

The notion of self-consciousness as a derivative of mourning is a widespread anthropological cliché in the 18th century, teaching us that man is a specific being, because he can envision or foresee his own future death in the past deaths of others – because he can melancholically (according to a logic of *proleptic retrospection*) mourn himself in advance. It is this relation to his own self which elevates him from a merely animal existence, in which there is no self-consciousness, because no idea of futurity exists, which in turn is because mourning is pure mourning, without any involvement of specularity, of mirroring or self-reflection (that is, without any self-recognition or any re-plication of consciousness upon itself). It is in this sense that Wordsworth calls man “a creature endowed with the faculties of foresight and reason,”²⁰ opposing him to the dog or horse, which are deemed to be incapable of melancholic self-mourning, since they are incapable of an imaginary identification with their future survivors.²¹ That is how the idea of futurity becomes the special charac-

19. The fact that, in Burke, examples for pain are often instances of punishment (sometimes even of horrendous torture), also seems remarkable, given that the English word “pain” comes, via French mediation, from the Latin *poena* meaning “penalty” in the sense of “payment” (something close to the semantics of the German word *Schuld* which means both “guilt” and “debt”).

20. William Wordsworth, “Essays upon Epitaphs,” in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Vol. 2, p. 52.

21. “The dog or horse perishes in the field, or in the stall, by the side of his companions, and is incapable of anticipating the sorrow with which his surrounding associates shall be-

teristic of humans, along with the habit of cautious thoughtfulness called prudence, which in turn implies a forward-looking, pro-spective premeditation or precaution, in short, providence. This is the idea lurking in the background, when Marx subordinates the industrious work of bees to human labour, his distinction being still based on the human ability to pre-conceive the design of future products.²² Burke's argument hardly fits into such an anthropocentric conception. For him, human investigations of the future never exceed the "investigations of a dog" (*Forschungen eines Hundes*), to use Kafka's phrase. When the dog's state of fear is shown as the fundamental form of any (potentially human) relation to the future, we may witness a double displacement of related conceptions by Hobbes and Locke, who defined fear, in opposition to hope, as one pole of the passions oriented toward the future.²³

moan his death, or pine for his loss; he cannot pre-conceive this regret, he can form no thought of it; and therefore cannot possibly have a desire to leave such regret or remembrance behind him" (Wordsworth, Vol. 2, p. 50). This same notion that animals have no future in the sense that they have no capacity for melancholic self-mourning (and thus no self-awareness) lurks behind the Heideggerian formulation that "Only humans die. Animals perish [*Nur der Mensch stirbt. Das Tier verendet*]" (Martin Heidegger, "Das Ding," in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994], p. 17).

22. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), Vol. I, p. 284.

23. As Hobbes puts it: "Which kind of thoughts, is called *Foresight*, and *Prudence*, or *Providence*, and sometimes *Wisdom*," or elsewhere: "*Aversion*, with opinion of *Hurt* from the object, *FEARE*," see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22 [1.3] and 41 [1.6] (emphases in the original). In Locke's formulation: "*Fear* is an uneasiness of the mind, upon the thought of future evil likely to befall us" (Locke, p. 218 [II.20]; emphasis in the original). Such formulations (also present in Descartes and Le Brun) certainly go back to the treatment of the passions in ancient Greek rhetorical thought. Aristotle, whose conception of fear is also referred to by Heidegger, defines it in his *Rhetoric* as "a pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future," and associates it with "the expectation that something destructive will happen to us" (1382a–b, [II.5]), see Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, accessed 1 June 2012 (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.html>).

The Aristotelian emphasis on fear as a state of disturbance or confusion re-emerges in the 18th century in the category of the pathetic, conceived as a state lacking sublime calmness and tranquillity. Unlike the "solemn sedateness" of the sublime, which in Baillie's rendering "rather composes than agitates" the mind (p. 97), the pathetic is a state of ceaseless distraction ("agitation," "hurrying," "crowding," p. 97), which is not too far from what Heidegger calls "curiosity" (*Neugier*: lust for what is new) and "entertainment" (*Zerstreuung*: dispersal or dissipation), and it seems to be fairly close to Burke's own opening argument on novelty and curiosity (on "children perpetually running from place to place to hunt out something new") in the very first section of the *Enquiry*. Schiller's conception of the pathetic runs along different and rather divergent lines of thought; see his 1793 essay *Über das Pathetische*, and

Burke does not simply underline the otherwise trivial, but often unmentioned fact that the animal is itself capable of fear and trembling, that is, of relating to the future, and that the notion of futurity entertained by the human being is not necessarily different from animal fear. Equally important seems the fact that Burke focuses on pain (and consequently, on fear as a passion turning upon pain, or on the sublime as a passion turning upon fear) precisely because the fundamental form of every sensation, considered as a passion passively suffered, is trauma. And since, according to this asymmetrical scheme, even pleasure is traumatic, and to that extent painful, it follows that hope as a disposition related to pleasure is not so much the opposite, much rather a subclass of fear. The future can only be conceived or sensed in the modality of fear, even if we expect it to be a pleasant one.

Let us now turn to the passage mentioned. As we shall see, pain and fear are put in parallel on the basis of a common physiological reaction: the “tension of the nerves,” the convulsive contraction of the muscular fibres.

A man who suffers under violent bodily pain; (I suppose the most violent, because the effect may be the more obvious). I say a man in great pain has his teeth set, his eye-brows are violently contracted, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence, his hair stands on end, the voice is forced out in short shrieks and groans, and the whole fabric totters. Fear or terror, which is an apprehension of pain or death, exhibits exactly the same effects, approaching in violence to those just mentioned in proportion to the nearness of the cause, and the weakness of the subject. This is not only so in the human species, but I have more than once observed in dogs, under an apprehension of punishment, that they have writhed their bodies, and yelped, and howled, as if they had actually felt the blows. From hence I conclude that pain, and fear, act upon the same parts of the body, and in the same manner, though somewhat differing in degree. That pain and fear consist in an unnatural tension of the nerves. . . . (131–132 [4.3])

As I have mentioned, the peculiarity of this passage does not only reside in its demonstration of a physiological resemblance between pain and fear, but just as much in its suggestive juxtaposition of human and animal reactions. By bringing the example of a dog in terror, the passage suggests that fear might just as well be the future oriented passion of a non-human. What we have here is the instance of an animal equipped with self-preserving foresight or self-protecting precaution (provi-

his two discussions of the sublime also touching upon the notion of the pathetic: *Vom Erhabenen* from 1793, and *Über das Erhabene* from 1793–96.

dence or prudence), which in turn is much closer to, say, Robinson Crusoe's paranoid safety measures, with all the famous examples of technical and economic invention inspired by the terror of native or alien invaders, than it is to the elevated notion of a self-aware and cool-headed orientation toward the future, which Wordsworth (or for that matter, Marx) attributes to humans, but certainly not to animals in the sense of "merely-living-beings" (as Heidegger calls them). Burke's example provides a rather prosaic picture, in which "human" carefulness is born from panic fear, which may in turn transform even dogs into "rational" animals, since it belongs to all animal beings.²⁴

Yet, the prime function of the passage is to demonstrate how fear resembles pain. Both passions produce tension, which is "a violent pulling of the fibres," as Burke specifies in a footnote. He can thus conclude that these passions differ only in degree, their scope and mode of action being the same. One should, of course, never mix up fear with pain, for it does matter whether we fear pain, or actually feel the pain which we would otherwise "only" fear. Nor does Burke confuse them. He insists on their difference, but claims that it is only a difference in degree. To fear something and to actually feel what one feared are two points along the same axis, so the difference between sentiment and presentiment, real and imaginary experience (feeling "actually" and feeling "as if . . . actually") can no longer be taken for granted, at least in qualitative terms. Fear fades into pain, and pain fades into fear. To suffer and to see someone suffer partake in the same physiology, in the same logic of *physis*, of physicality conceived in terms of the senses.

At this point, Burke's argument runs parallel to Adam Smith's statement, repeated several times in the opening passages of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a work published in 1759, the year when the second edition of the *Enquiry* was issued. Although Smith talks about sympathy, rather than fear, the insight he repeatedly underlines is very similar to that proposed by Burke: in the disposition of sympathy (just as in fear) we "tremble and shudder at the thought of what [the sufferer] feels," which is a clear evidence for the fact that the idea of suffering excites in us "some degree of the same emotion."²⁵ And since, for Smith, pain implies physical contact, while the source of any idea of suffering is primarily visual (the subject of sympathy

24. On the Cyrenaic derivation of prudence from the fear of punishment, see Richard Parry, "Ancient Ethical Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed 1 June 2012 (<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/ethics-ancient/>).

25. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 14 [1.1.1]. The notion of attentive spectatorship returns later in the all-pervasive figure of the "impartial spectator."

being an “attentive spectator”²⁶), the above resemblance between suffering and sympathy, or passion and compassion, can be seen as a resemblance between touching and vision, as if the author of the treatise wanted to open a discourse on the pains of spectatorship, de-differentiating received distinctions between tactile and visual modes of perception in an Aristotelian manner.²⁷

For Smith (as for Burke) sympathy is an imaginary substitution allowing us to participate in the pains (or pleasures) of others: “By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”²⁸ One of the many examples mentioned by Smith shows us the weak frame of those who have little immunity to the traumatizing sight of beggars, and who are thus fatally exposed to the mechanism of emotional transference: “Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the street, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies.”²⁹ This mechanism of transference is akin to the way words convey the passions from one man to another in Burke’s description near the end of the *Enquiry*: “by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another” (175 [5.7]).

But while the Burkean notion of “contagion” suggests a continuity between the passion of one person and the compassion of another, and implies the unquestionable authenticity of sympathetic feeling, the tendency of Smith’s argument points to a different conclusion. Smith’s abundant examples, about which Burke himself expressed his fascination both in a letter he sent to Smith on 10 September 1759 and in the review he published the same year in the *Annual Register*, are suggestive in a way that no longer supports, much rather threatens to subvert or at least unbalance Burke’s stance. For at least three of these examples point toward the possibility, neglected by Burke, of a mistaken sympathy or a “mis-sensing” of sorts. For when he comes to the image of the madman or the moaning infant, both of whom may feel very well or only slightly uncomfortable, while their spectators might feel extremely sorry for them, his meaning is that sympathy is often in error. And this is even more clearly so in situations of grief

26. Smith, p. 15 [1.1.1].

27. See Book 2 in Aristotle’s treatise *On the Soul*, and especially his argument on the relation of sense-perception to mediation in Parts 7–11, moving from vision (via hearing, smell, and taste) to touch.

28. Smith, pp. 13–14 [1.1.1].

29. Smith, p. 14 [1.1.1].

(which is his last example), when survivors feel compassion for the deceased person, who himself no longer feels anything, and yet those mourning over his loss constantly imagine his continued suffering, and thereby paradoxically perform what I would call a *sympathy for apathy*. In all three of these cases, sympathy is left groundless and shown redundant. It is presented as the sheer redundancy or overperformance of a function which has no basis in the physical world. Interestingly enough, the reverse possibility, that of an underperforming sympathy, remains out of sight for Smith, although a pain without any visible (or in any other way perceptible) symptom and thus without any sympathetic recognition must have been a common experience already in his time (even if the somatic production of symptoms for the acknowledgment of pain by others might still have gone unrecognized).³⁰ Thus, sympathy may often be erroneous, not only because one

30. Cf. Elaine Scarry, "Among School Children: The Use of Body Damage to Express Physical Pain," *Interfaces* 26 (2007) 11–36. Interestingly, neither Smith, nor Burke appears on Scarry's critical horizon, her celebrated book *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) included. Scarry nevertheless seems rather critical regarding the expressibility of pain. At one point, she frames this problematic as a question of deciding whether something is a "tool" or a "weapon": "If, for example, someone were to object that the ax that cuts through the tree . . . should be called a weapon rather than a tool, the person making the objection would almost certainly turn out to be one who believes that the vegetable world is sentient and capable of experiencing some form of pain; conversely, if one were to object that the knife that cuts through the cow is a tool the person would be someone who has retracted the privileges of sentience from the animal world and thinks of cows as already-food and therefore, not-quite-alive (as we more routinely think of trees as not-quite-alive)" (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, pp. 173–74).

The question of the animal seems decisive. Since the animal – at least since Aristotle – is defined (in opposition to the plant) as a sensitive being, any attempt to tell animals from plants presupposes our human sensitivity to the sensitive, our ability to sense the sensing of another being, ultimately reducing to human (or rather, since man himself is an animal, "humanimal") sensibility all other forms of animal sensibility. It is no wonder that investigations of the sensing faculty in the 18th century (the age of "sensibility") included the most extreme instances of eliciting pain, and finally, of vivisection. The most widely known example is the Swiss physician and anatomist Albrecht von Haller, in whose vocabulary the term "sensibility" refers to a mental faculty exclusively human, and it is only the physical capacity called "irritability" which is common to all animals. Haller's "devotedness" to specify animality along this principle of irritability resulted in the lethal agony of a large number of dogs. One is hardly surprised that La Mettrie, who held radically different views and located the relations between man and animal along a continuum of mechanistic operations, dedicated his essay on *The Man-Machine* precisely to Haller, as an ironic token of his utmost "respect." In the background of Haller's experiments, it is not very difficult to detect a claim for the human meta-sensation of all animal sensations, without any considerable "sensitivity" to the

might sympathize with a passion which is unlike the one really felt by the other person, but more radically because one might feel sympathy where one shouldn't and feel no sympathy where one certainly should.³¹

At a closer look, it seems that the potential malfunction which Smith locates in the imaginative workings of sympathy is not entirely unfamiliar to Burke, who faces a similar difficulty when, right before the passage on the tormented man and the threatened dog, in a section devoted specifically to association, he addresses the etiological problem of the origin or efficient cause of the passions. This is a strategic point in the discourse since its function is nothing less than to give an account of the association that would allow for the maintenance of Burke's empiricist stance. The empiricist methodology had of course been announced well before, back in the Introduction, where Burke voted for the fundamentally natural (vs. acquired) operation of taste: "It is confessed, that custom, and some other causes, have made many deviations from the natural pleasures or pains which belong to these several Tastes; but then the power of distinguishing

paradox this implies (namely, to the gesture of humanizing or "humanizing" the animal, and thereby positioning the human sensorium as the criterion for all animal modes of sensing, including invertebrate species as well as semi-animal life forms such as mushrooms, for instance). In her recent book on *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Ildikó Csengei discusses these issues very informatively; see especially the chapter on "The Feeling Machine" (75–118), an early version of which appeared in the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 9.2 (2003) 155–80. Csengei also draws on Scarry's analyses, laying little emphasis, however, on the aforementioned critical aspects I find so crucial. As long as the criterion for an ethical response is conceived (as it is in the last subchapter, 112–18) as an attentive listening to the woeful cries or begging of the victim, we keep repeating the Hallerian gesture, and neglect the possibility so clearly discerned by Adam Smith (apropos of the potentially errant, i.e. redundant or absent, character of sympathy), and so emphatically taken up by Scarry, namely, that there might be a discontinuity between the perceptual apparatus of the animal and the perceptual apparatus of the human, and in fact, between *any two singular beings* – whether "human," "animal," or "plant," or even "mineral," these categories themselves no longer being taken for granted – wherefore neither of them can serve, occupying the position of a meta-sensor, as a criterion for any of the others.

31. Smith's argument on the possibility of "mis-sensing" (as I would call it) could be said to circumvent what a few decades later is depicted by Friedrich Schlegel as a problem of "mis-understanding" (of someone else's meaning or "sense") in his 1800 essay *On Incomprehensibility*. This constellation of mis-sensing and misunderstanding (of sense) does not only shed light on the moral aspect of Schlegel's discourse, but it also turns Smith's moral philosophy into a theory of language written in a peculiarly moralistic dialect. It gives his examples a hermeneutic or rhetorical twist, and opens a link to his own treatment of language three years later in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1762).

between the nature and the acquired relish remains to the very last” (Introduction, 14). Still in the Introduction, right in the next paragraph, Burke speaks of “unnatural habits and associations” (ibid. 15). Association (itself “associated” to custom or habit, and implicitly to the notion of indifference as “second nature”) appears to be “unnatural” in that it denaturalizes *physis*, while its very process is itself part of *physis* and is to that extent as natural as can be. Association becomes the most natural denaturalizing function, nature’s self-deprivation, the split of the material base. It hinders any etiological reach for the senses presupposed in this project as “the great originals” of all our ideas (ibid. 23), and consequently, it also weakens the seemingly firm status of the natural object. To that extent, it threatens to shake the “ground-work of taste” claimed to be “common to all” (ibid.), and has the potential to call into question the empirical basis and methodological scheme of the whole endeavour. No wonder that association will re-emerge later, in the framework of a separate section, as “no small bar” for a project which attempts to trace all emotions back to their undistorted natural sources (130 [4.2]).

The greater the difficulty caused by association, the greater the urge to purify passion from associative intervention by anchoring it in a (supposedly) uncontaminated experience of immediate pain. In the section devoted to association, Burke distinguishes two kinds of fear, one affecting us by the natural properties of the object, and the other affecting us by association. He then claims the necessity to derive the latter from the former in a logic similar to the derivation of the figural from the literal sense of a word. Burke’s claim seems utterly justified since the very notion of the figural implies literality as its origin: “some things must have been originally and naturally agreeable or disagreeable, from which the others derive their associated powers” (131 [4.2]). Since however the “originally and naturally” terrifying character of an object is based upon what Burke in the previous section calls “the immediately sensible qualities of things,” naturally elicited fear (as opposed to fear by association) must ultimately go back to the notion of pain understood as an immediate sense-perception. For Burke, the source of associated fear is a natural fear, whose source in turn is pain. Thus, all fear must be ultimately anchored in pain. But whereas the reference of naturally elicited fear is pain, the reference of associated fear is itself just fear, albeit one which in turn refers to pain. In this respect, the distinction between natural and associated fear appears as the mere repetition (within the notion of fear) of the prior distinction between pain and fear. In linguistic terms, one could again compare this Burkean scheme to the Augustinian gesture of deriving the difference between literal and figural meanings from a prior difference between things and signs, the implication being that the meaning of literal signs are things, whereas the meaning of

figural signs are themselves signs, and it is only the meaning of these latter signs which are things *per se*.³² But at the same time, fear as such (that is, even “natural” fear) appears to be based on association in a radically intrinsic or ineluctable way, for it seems that the very concept of fear presupposes association. And perhaps this is why a few sections later, Burke himself speaks of terror in a general sense as an “associated danger” (136 [4.8]), implying that fear as such is structurally based upon association, since even “originally and naturally” fearful things are feared because former traumatic memories are imaginatively connected to the sensual reappearance of these things. Association is indeed “no small bar” for Burke, it structurally governs fear, and as we shall see, it also radically enters the realm of pain, at the precise moment when pain itself becomes fear, that is, when pain attains the structure of fear.

This happens at a point when Burke no longer discusses their fundamental resemblance (the tension implied in both), but begins to specify their difference. He does so by reference to a reciprocal relation between the body and the mind:

The only difference between pain and terror, is, that things which cause pain operate on the mind, by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting the danger. (132 [4.3])

His example is the Italian physiognomist Tommaso Campanella, famous for his ability to penetrate into other people’s minds by mimicking their bodily behaviour, but even more famous perhaps for his legendary power to feign madness in the face of the torments he had to suffer when he was subjected to the Inquisition’s thirty-six-hour *veglia* torture in 1601.³³ The first of these magic abilities uses the body as a

32. Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis & New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958). For the distinction between things and signs, see I.2 and II.1. The distinction between the literal and the figural (II.10) remarkably appears after a distinction between natural and conventional signs (II.1).

33. In fact, the torture itself was inflicted on Campanella with the purpose of finding out whether he had been feigning madness to escape punishment for heresy. As Joseph Scalzo pointed out, the so-called *veglia* torture was originally invented in the mid-sixteenth century as a sleep-deprivation torture (cf. *vigilia*), but had been by the early seventeenth century improved, as it were, into an even more excruciating agony, which “prevented any relief from constant pain” (“Campanella, Foucault, and Madness in Late-Sixteenth Century Italy,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21.3 [1990] 359–371, p. 367). The torture started on 4 June 1601. “Campanella, after having been stripped naked, had his hands tied behind his back, and by means of a rope pulled tightly upward, was forced to balance his heavy frame on his toes, while his shoulder blades and joints were placed in a painfully distorted position. Moreover, a *cavallo* or horse was placed behind him. This device, composed of a seat or board studded

medium to access the minds of others, by using it to alter one's own state of mind in a like manner.³⁴ A few lines later, the same procedure is illustrated by the influence of drugs upon the mental or emotional disposition of a person. To the extent that this procedure uses the body to act upon the mind, it seems to follow the logic of pain. The second faculty, the power to resist pain, seems to work the other way round, using the mind to program the body, by utilizing a mechanism which Burke has described under the heading of fear. According to Burke's description, the central element of this mechanism is attention.

Campanella . . . could so abstract his attention from any sufferings of his body, that he was able to endure the rack itself without much pain; and in lesser pains, every body must have observed, that when we can employ our attention on any thing else, the pain has been for a time suspended.

(133 [4.4])

What seems interesting, even baffling, in Burke's description is the very possibility of pain itself being mediated, and operating in a manner which makes it rather difficult, if not utterly impossible, to account for traumatic impulses as "the immediately sensible qualities of things," which is what Burke aims at in this otherwise empirically committed endeavour. What modern psychology has formulated in the

with sharp spikes or nails, would tear into the flesh of his posterior if he tried to relax from the agonizing position in which he was placed" (Scalzo, p. 367). While at first Campanella responded to the questions and requests of his tormentors with all sorts of "nonsensical exhortations amid vile cursing and swearing," later on he grew utterly silent and motionless, and "no longer showed any visible sign of pain" (Scalzo, p. 367). As one of the testimonies cited by Scalzo puts it: after the torture, Campanella "left everyone confused, and in more doubt than ever as to whether he might be mad or wise" (Scalzo, p. 367).

34. A famous description of this method of physiognomic identification is to be found in Poe's story of "The Purloined Letter," in the schoolboy's confessional remark concerning his success at guessing in the game of "even and odd": "When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression" (James A. Harrison, ed., *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe* [New York: Putnam, 1902], Vol. VI, p. 41). The mention of Campanella (among others) right after this passage is hardly surprising, and links 19th-century physiognomy (in Poe or Baudelaire) to late-renaissance thought. For somewhat more on this, see S. L. Vardano's brief but suggestive article: "The Case of the Sublime Purloin; or Burke's *Inquiry* as the Source of an Anecdote in 'The Purloined Letter,'" *Poe Newsletter* 1.2 (October 1968), p. 27. As Vardano notes, Poe was acquainted with, and even discussed, Burke's speculation on physiognomy.

so-called “gate control theory” of pain is described here rather prosaically as a function of attention.³⁵ Attention works as a painkiller, alleviating or entirely erasing the suffering it is called to cope with.³⁶ It seems important to note however that attention can only do so, by superimposing another pain upon the pain it wants to suspend. For attention, as the very word tells us, is based on tension much the same way as the pain which it wants to transcend. Attention is a form of tension, or convulsion, implying an attendance or tendency or tending which causes the stretching or pulling of the nerves or fibres. The tension of attention is then itself an instance of pain, but one which is no longer based upon immediate sense-perception, but is contaminated, so to say, by an element of distance, both a move away from, and a move toward, the “traumatic.”

Attention is “teletrauma” both because, as a potential painkiller, it may distance us from suffering, and because, due to its very structure, it can only do so by triggering tension in relation to something distant. As Peter de Bolla put it some ten years ago, “distance is a necessary component of attention; it has, say, a focal length, hence the sense that at closer ranges or more distant reaches things are relegated to the field of the inattentive.”³⁷ For de Bolla, this has to do with the direction or trajectory of attention, inasmuch as attention is a mode of focusing. To focus means to attain a specific distance in relation to the object attended to, the implication being that all other objects are simultaneously relegated to the twilight zone of inattention. As de Bolla rightly points out, “Attention always comes attached to the inattentive, since in bringing one thing into the right distance everything else is removed to different distances.”³⁸ In that sense, inattention is by no means opposite to attention, but rather “attention *includes* inattention.”³⁹ For de Bolla, the opposite of attention is “distraction.” He argues that distraction is defined by a lack of focus, and

35. Cf. Ronald Melzack and Patrick David Wall: “Pain Mechanisms: A New Theory,” *Science* 150 (19 November 1965) 971–79. The “gate control theory” is challenging earlier conceptions known as the “specificity theory” and the “pattern theory” of pain. See also Ronald Melzack, *The Puzzle of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

36. Descartes seems more moderate about this: “the soul, in becoming extremely attentive to something else . . . can easily overcome lesser passions, but not the most vigorous and the strongest, until after the excitation of the blood and spirits has abated” (Descartes, p. 60).

37. Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 61.

38. De Bolla, p. 61.

39. De Bolla, *Art Matters*, p. 62. At this point, de Bolla’s assertion resonates with Wolfgang Welsch’s earlier claim, formulated in a different lexicon, that “No *aisthesis* without *anaisthesis*,” because “a kind of anaesthetics is inscribed into perception itself” and “this internal anaesthetics is a necessary condition for the external efficiency of perception” (Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010 (1990)], pp. 32 and 34); for a similar argument, see also Welsch’s *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996), pp. 130–131.

accordingly, by a lack of attention. If however we pay “attention” to the suggestive resonance of the words *contraction* and *distraction*, we may conclude rather that distraction is not entirely different from the contractive tension of attention, but is rather a diversive acceleration or fragmentary accumulation of it, in short, a *diversion* of *adversion*. In other words, distraction is the very drifting of attention, its continual *turning* elsewhere, which is in fact a continual *being* turned elsewhere, just as the description of children’s curiosity at the very beginning of Burke’s treatise suggests in the opening section on novelty (31 [1.1]). The superficiality manifested in the perpetual reorientation of infant attention appears now as a structural component of attention’s necessarily drifting motion, which also makes it impossible for us ever to “employ” it (precautiously, preventively) as a painkiller. The focusing moves of attention can never be intended, if intention itself is a mode of tending, and, as such, part and parcel of the process we are trying to indicate here (i.e. the tension of attention), rather than being an external principle directing its move. Attention may certainly lessen or even kill pain, but it cannot be instrumentalized to do so, since one should first intend such instrumental employment or usage, but intention is already a form of attention, rather than being a preparation for it – which means that, all appearances to the contrary, Campanella was, at the most, fortunate.

Later, in Part 4, Burke also insists that attention is labour or work, “an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles” (135 [4.6]). To the extent that this “exertion” is beyond instrumental employment, the work of attention emerges as the work of an unemployed power. What is implied here is not simply that unemployed attention is still attention hard at work, much rather that this work begins where any employment ends. Since I know very well how painful such attentive tension or contraction can be, now let me finally thank the reader’s painstaking work.