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"The Effects of Blackness": Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant

Stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation. Like fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken—are not allowed.

—bell hooks[1]

Of course, to have a phenomenal knowledge of others may in fact be enough for using them to our own advantage. But it may not be felt sufficient for constructing the kind of universal subjectivity which a ruling class requires for its ideological solidarity. For this purpose, it might be possible to attain to something which, while not strictly knowledge, is nonetheless very like it. This pseudo-knowledge is known as the aesthetic.

—Terry Eagleton[2]

Black bodies, reflecting none, or but a few rays, with regard to sight are but as so many vacant spaces dispersed among the objects we view.

—Edmund Burke[3]

In the eighteenth century, largely through the influence of an aesthetic treatise by Edmund Burke and the *precritical* aesthetics of Immanuel Kant, the sublime became both an effect of an *object* which inspired terror *and* the disposition of a subject capable of aesthetic judgment. What has not often been recognized in subsequent analyses of these texts is that in each the sublime is described not only through analogies to the differences between the sexes (Burke and Kant), but also as a product of an aesthetic disposition inherent in sexual, national, and historical characteristics (Kant), and is sometimes provoked by images of racial difference (Burke and Kant). The description of the sublime in terms of culture, race, nation, or gender ought now to be a highly remarkable feature of discussions of aesthetics, particularly to the extent that it suggests that aesthetic discourse was not only integral to the construction of a "self-determining" bourgeois subject, but also that this subject was positioned within growing discourses of difference in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] There is, however, a provocative silence on the relation between the sublime and the exotic, and even the most insightful commentaries on the romantic sublime spawned by recent interests in deconstruction have neglected to mention the prevalent association between the sublime and various, embodied, forms of difference.[5] The reason for this is, perhaps, that the philosophical discourses of sublimity turn away from such embodied (and often "exotic") forms at the same time that they abjure the relevance of historical and cultural contingencies which have thrown them into the line of vision.[6] The repetitive motions with which the national, cultural, racial, or gendered bodies of the sublime are erased in order to assert the "naturalness" of aesthetic vision indicates a persistent anxiety and ambivalence surrounding the relationship between subjectivity, aesthetics, and the production of images—one could even say stereotypes—of difference.

Prior to Kant's third *Critique,* natural objects or "majestic scenes in nature" (mountains, oceans, vast spaces), sublime objects or phenomena which are suggestive of things not readily encompassed, conceptualized, or represented, are joined by "culturally unintelligible" *bodies* and *others.* It is a cliché of criticism that romantic poets reformulated theologically transcendent ideas in natural symbolism, and that natural objects and phenomena familiar in European countries became emblems of sublimity in the secular imagination of lyric poets. What is not often observed in discussions of this reformulation is not simply that the *naturalization* also applies to its attachment to specific bodies but also that these

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bodies are often imported from foreign domains, "other" by virtue of racial or cultural differences, often from regions important to imperialistic designs of European empires.[7] Yet, even if such bodies are initially "abject"—neither subject nor object—they quickly become *subjected to* an aesthetic discourse. By positioning the subject within a constellation of images of foreign bodies which compel sublime vision, the aesthetic uses these "abject" or "black bodies" to organize desires for difference while compelling the disavowal of the transgressive passions with which they are associated. The "ideology of the aesthetic"[8] is, then, not limited to the construction of a subject which must position itself within the coercive demands of the state. Rather, aesthetic discourse at least since Burke and Kant locates this subject within a global network of "bodies" (sensual signs of the sublime) whose gendered, national, and racial markings are integral to that subject's self-identification (if not also its unspoken or illegitimate desires).

The difficulties inherent in this double maneuver may be part of the reason why sublimity, though inspiring awe or wonder, is not always thought particularly pleasing, and is a site of extreme ambivalence. The discomfort instigated by the sublime (as aesthetic artifact and as aesthetic discourse) might be read as a tension between two somewhat conflicting and competing possibilities. First, according to a "transcendent" interpretation of the sublime which buys into the rhetoric of philosophical aesthetics, sublime vision is problematic because it harbors within itself the contradictions and regret which arise from confrontations with difference and the inevitable failure of aesthetic discourse to satisfy desires for totality and unity. In the rhetorical heart of sublime vision is the awareness that *prior to* this visionary totality there is a break or rupture between the ideal of the whole and the incoherent experiences of the real. The task of the aesthetic might be, then, to create a provisional resolution for this breach. For instance, the sublime could be an emblem of the superiority of reason (as an indication of the supersensible in man), exemplifying unity, mastery, and control of frightening or alien aspects of the natural world,[9] as it was in Kant's third *Critique*. It could be an image of unity with a deity, or, strictly subjectively, the union of rational and imaginative faculties. Or, the sublime could be the mark of noble feelings in particular races—in Kant's precritical aesthetics such nobility was attributed to "Englishmen." But on a more melancholy note, the sublime might approach the apocalyptic vision of some Romantic painters, the Burkean terror-filled sublime, a threat to visions of totality, or a broken unity between creature (most often masculine) and deity or the natural world, sometimes suggesting a mark of permanent difference, exile, and alienation. And, for Burke, this negative, melancholy mark of the sublime could be aptly (and uncritically) allegorized in a young white man's fear of a black female. For Kant, terrifying expressions of the sublime were the province of "the Spaniard" as a national type. The sublime is in these latter instances some thing or body which is imagined to be *threatening,* the experience of which can be integral not only to the experiencing, aestheticizing subject's integration or identity-formation, but also to a general classification of the physiologies and feelings of all those noble, splendid, or terrifying "others" encountered with growing imperialist and nationalist claims. Finally, while it may serve as a basis for power and mastery within aesthetic ideology, the sublime is also a figure for the terror of images and passions which transgress the "natural" orders of society. In aesthetic discourse, the threat of this excess must be simultaneously provoked by, contained within, and sacrificed to the economy of sublime vision.

And here another, far less transcendent but perhaps more troubling, possibility emerges. The sublime is not simply a moment of terror and privation on the way to a recovery of self-possession and mastery (or recognition of oneself within a transcendent symbolic order); rather, the sublime exceeds this drama of identification and marks the sheer ecstasy of the image of foreign bodies. Making the sublime less terrifying or obscure is the business of aesthetic discourse; in Burke's *Enquiry,* the aesthetic works to contain passions, direct desire, and steady what is already an unsteady and passionate eye for excess. In this work, there is not only no end, but by definition, no satisfaction.

I. NO SATISFACTION: DECEPTIVE PASSIONS OF THE "UNSTEADY EYE"

Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beau-*

tiful[10] stimulated eighteenth-century psychological interests in the sublime, and contributed to their popularity in the 1780s and 1790s.[11] Burke's *Enquiry* provides a detailed account of properties (vastness, darkness, etc.) generally understood to be sublime. His argument and interpretation also, however, offer an initial instance of how aesthetic categories are used to create or replicate racial and gender-based distinctions. Burke builds his interpretation of the difference between the beautiful and the sublime from a "primary" distinction between the sexes. To this opposition (beauty : feminine :: sublime : masculine), Burke, schooled as he is in gothic horror stories, ascribes sublimity to "dark" or "black" things. Not surprisingly, the heterosexual opposition between genders is matched with another between light and dark (beauty : feminine : light :: sublime : masculine : dark).

It is significant that one of Burke's primary examples of the terrifying natural "effects of blackness" complicates his associational matrix. Here, it is precisely a *black female* which is sublime, suggesting that the feminine can be *both* (safely) beautiful and, as in the case of a body which is both black *and* female, sublime and threatening. The contradictions in Burke's text sometimes make his argument less coherent while at the same time indicating a limit to his claim that distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime are founded in "natural" effects. In short, these contradictions suggest the work of an ideological process of making what is contingent and local, perhaps even idiosyncratic, in matters of taste appear to be natural, and thus beyond dispute.

The terror and ambivalence which surrounds the image of the black female may be symptomatic of the pressure exerted by culturally marked categories of race and gender upon aesthetic discourse, of an excess which troubles (where it also thrills?) aesthetic vision. If the *Enquiry* is Burke's attempt to provide the "invariable and certain laws" of taste outlined in the introduction, the associational matrixes he sketches—and in the process of illustrating, often confounds—are also *exclusionary:* they mark not only the contours of beauty and sublimity but also cast some bodies "outside" the boundaries Burke has set for each category of aesthetic experience. The black female is one such abject being, a product of the ideological contradictions produced by Burke's (gendered) distinctions between beauty and sublimity.[12] At the same time, Burke's fascination with passion and desire is part of an attempt to contain the thrill provoked by sublime images, to turn the gaze away from this excess and to channel vision into socially acceptable or "satisfactory" appropriations of terror and ecstasy—which, ironically, gives "no satisfaction," ensuring a continual need for terrifying novelties.

Far before the troubling appearance of the black female, however, Burke distinguishes between the many feelings, passions, and desires and their attendant pain and pleasure. *Self-preservation* and *society* (of the sexes), conceived as separate categories of *passions* which must be incorporated within aesthetic experience, are the foundation for Burke's thesis. The implicit aim is to educate desire toward social ends, especially the reproduction of the existing relation between the sexes, itself a metaphorical expression of the bond between the state and its subjects. The passions belonging to self-preservation are those which "turn mostly on *pain* or *danger*" (*E*, p. 38),[13] while those which are most conducive to the society of the sexes bring pleasure and belong to the idea of generation. Burke argues that passions can, according to this initial distinction, be divided not only along lines of pain and pleasure but also that passions which are provoked by self-preservation (pain and danger) can be called sublime and those of society (pleasure and—or in—generation and love) can be called beautiful:

> The passion which belongs to generation, merely as such, is lust only; this is evident in brutes, whose passions are more unmixed, and which pursue their purposes more directly than ours. ... But man, who is a creature adapted to a greater variety and intricacy of relation, connects with the general passion, the idea of some *social* qualities, which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with all other animals; and as he is not designed like them to live at large, *it is fit that he should have something to create a preference, and fix his choice;* and this in general should be some sensible qualities; as no other can so quickly, so powerfully, or so surely produce its effect. *The object therefore of this mixed passion which we call love, is the beauty of the sex.* Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by

personal *beauty.* I call beauty a social quality: for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them, (and there are many that do so) they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary. (*E,* pp. 42–43; my italics)

Creating a preference, hoping to fix an object, Burke aligns beauty with the feminine and the sublime with the masculine, addresses the male subject, and gives him his object: "the beautiful feminine." Now it is not only that the sublime has to do with pain and danger, and beauty with the pleasures of love, but also that the dangers of the sublime relate to the active and "the masculine," and the pleasures of beauty to the passive tenderness of "the feminine." Burke's rhetoric elicits the reader's appreciation of the "naturalness" of such associations, and directs attention away from any already-constructed cultural base.[14] For instance, in his discussion of gradual variation[15] Burke attributes beauty to the subtle "change of surface" which occurs as the eye travels down a woman's neck and across her breasts. In building a philosophical foundation for the universal principles of taste, Burke takes care to distinguish what is a product of mere association and what is not. By giving a gender to beauty and sublimity, however, he draws attention to what seems an inevitable cultural significance which attaches to particular objects and bodies (not to mention the value attributed to particular texts in his heritage, such as the Bible, *Paradise Lost,* or the *Iliad*). For Burke, then, his vision (the vision of a philosopher, not of "vulgar" perception) of the female neck is "natural," the beauty he sees *a matter of form* rather than a product of values cultivated in or supported by particular cultural milieus. Yet, more than this, he also asks the viewer to identify the object "of this mixed passion we call love" as beautiful, and not only to turn his love toward this passive and tender beauty, but to imagine the vision of beauty as itself giving way to passivity. He wants the eye both to travel the "deceitful maze" of desire and to feel itself *turn away from* desire and *toward* love. Burke is both luring and chastising the giddy eye, asking that it both react to his provocative body tracing, and that it learn to powerfully resist his temptations:

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. 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? (*E,* p. 115)

Burke had taken great pains in his opening remarks on beauty in part III to distinguish between the emotions caused by beauty and those caused by desire or lust (this in order to make sure that desire will not distract him, will not make chaos of theory). Burke's instruction turns the eye toward a particular quality which produces the beautiful (that "continual but hardly perceptible" change of surface) and away from a desire for the woman's body (her neck and breasts), hoping to move the eye and its attendant passions away from the immediate "animal" attraction to her sex alone (which is different from "the *beauty* of her *sex*").[16] A servant to the caprice, whims, and fancies for which there can be no rules or fixed principles, the unsteady gaze could only take Burke on a detour from his avowed aim, to find "invariable and certain laws" of taste which, it is implied, regulate the society of the sexes.[17]

Working against the "unsteady eye," Burke claims that "[b]y beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it." He adds an important parenthesis, stating that the parameters of his definition spring from the inevitable "distractions" from the "direct visual force" of images which arise from "secondary considerations" (such as sympathy or desire):

I confine this definition to the merely sensible qualities of things, for the sake of preserving the utmost simplicity in a subject which must always distract us, whenever we take in those various causes of sympathy which attach us to any persons or things from secondary considerations, and not from the direct force which they have *merely on being viewed.* I likewise distinguish love, by which I mean that satisfaction

which arises to the mind upon *contemplating* any thing beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be, from desire or lust; which is an energy of the mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects, that do not affect us as they are beautiful, but by means altogether different. *We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; while the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire.* Which shews that beauty, and the passion caused by beauty, which I call love, is different from desire, though desire may sometimes operate along with it; but it is to this latter that we must attribute those violent and tempestuous passions, and the consequent emotions of the body which attend what is called love in some of its ordinary acceptations, and not to the effects of beauty merely as it is such. (*E*, p. 91; my emphasis)

What all of this indicates is, first of all, a need demonstrated throughout the *Enquiry* (and particularly in passages relating to the beautiful or sublime qualities of the feminine or masculine, or the horrors of "darkness"), to treat the character of aesthetic traits as *natural* or pure—separate from secondary considerations (desire, possession) or the interference of cultural prejudice. And this need arises because of Burke's difficulty in explaining away the passion for abject pleasures which attends sublime vision, or the persistence of "violent and tempestuous passions" which are not easily corralled by the compulsory society of the sexes to which Burke submits (himself, his audience). If the eye is kept steady on the "direct visual force of things," the gaze will not follow distracting indirections and will (prefer to) remain within this "natural" love of beauty (of the feminine; metaphorically, of submission), such preference in turn preparing the way for a universalization of the laws and principles of the aesthetic. As indicated in the phrase "merely on being viewed," the culturally generated valuation of particular traits as feminine or masculine, aesthetically beautiful or sublime based on these sexual connotations, or the ideological markings of the abject, elude recognition. It is also clear, however, that the "direct force" which things have "merely on being viewed" is itself at times too great *not* to provoke that "energy of mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects." Were this not the case, the need to control the gaze and make the subject see without desiring would not be nearly as compelling. It is not accidental that Burke's desire to distinguish between the sublime and the beautiful also forces a separation of the power and greatness of male authority from the small, feminine thing which is beautiful, primarily because "we love what submits to us." The submission of the unsteady eye, like that of the feminine, is the desired accomplishment of the aesthetic.

II. "THE EFFECTS OF *BLACKNESS*" AND "THE CRIES OF *ANIMALS*"

Throughout the *Enquiry,* Burke is clearly interested in the psychological reaction to beautiful or sublime objects, but the emphasis is placed on the properties of *objects themselves* in aesthetic experience as they affect the eye, the primary organ of sensibility, rather than on the function of particular faculties. The objects and bodies which interest Burke are those which are capable of producing a strong reaction in the subject, and the highly physiological nature of this response is assumed to strengthen his argument that such effects are natural rather than constructed merely through association.[18] The imagined subject of aesthetic experience necessarily remains a *reactionary* agent, not one who actively constructs categories of aesthetic judgment. This subject is, then, split from Burke himself who is capable of educating us to respond fully to objects which naturally provoke (potentially universal) feelings of pleasure and pain proper to experiences of beauty or sublimity. While he describes the psychology of *feelings* (pleasure, pain, and delight) in detail in part I, they are in fact preparatory to a classification of *objects*[19] which produce these feelings, rather than the basis of a reflective psychological analysis of the importance of aesthetic experience in the construction of subjectivity as such.

The eye is important to Burke because it is the organ most effective in conveying notions of the sublime, and is therefore also the primary organ through which the aesthetic can regulate the passionate excess associated with the power, magnitude, and obscurity of sublime visions. Although he gives some play to the effects of sound, taste, and smell, he is chiefly preoccupied with the force of visual images (paintings, but also "nature") and "texts" (poems, but also voices).[20] Significantly, what most excites the

passions and is sublime, in image or sound, is indistinct or obscure. Even sublime sounds, as suggested in the section on "The cries of ANIMALS," are those which "imitate the natural *inarticulate* voices of men or any animals in pain or danger" (*E*, p. 84; my emphasis).[21] The lure of the sublime is precisely its apparent lack of intelligibility,[22] its ability to strike one deaf and blind: a thrill resides in the effort to distinguish the meaning or passion within inarticulate voices or to make the obscure visible. Perhaps a wish *to remain* in this inarticulate, obscure realm turns the eye toward the terror of sublime images; but if this wish is active in the *Enquiry,* it lives only to be contained within a legitimate, limited aesthetic experience.

In sublime moments, the mind is *astonished* in the face of the sheer *excessiveness* of its object, and the soul experiences a suspension of activity:

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

Burke describes how the sublime "hurries the mind out of itself" in the crowding and confusion of images; what it hurries the mind to, in this moment of suspension and confusion, is terror inspired by fear, the "ruling principle of the sublime" (*E*, p. 58). Sublime things are terrible because they are obscure, "dark, uncertain, confused, terrible" (*E*, p. 59). They are decidedly not the products of clear ideas or vision: "[i]t is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination" (*E*, p. 60).[23] What inspires terror in these situations, for Burke, is the experience of a loss of control: the mind is overwhelmed by the power of the image, and can neither directly grasp nor reproduce it. At the same time, the sublime fascinates and lures one on because of its attachment to uncertainty and darkness—it is beyond clear representation:

> We are first prepared with the utmost solemnity for the vision; we are first terrified, before we are let even into the obscure cause of our emotion; but when this grand cause of terror makes its appearance, what is it? is it not, wrapt up in the shades of its own incomprehensible darkness, more awful, more striking, more terrible, than the liveliest description, than the clearest painting could possibly represent it? (*E*, p. 63)

Free of danger, the terror of the sublime is capable of "turning the soul in upon itself,"[24] of mirroring the strongest passions and emotions to be found there—which is not to say that Burke thinks of the sublime as merely a projection of the mind's emotion. Rather, Burke is arguing for a necessary correspondence between particular kinds of objects and the sensations, feelings, and passions which they allow the mind to contemplate and perfect:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.[25] ... 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.[26]

Initially sparking a fear of bodily pain and endangerment, sublime vision incites passion and becomes delightful when immediate danger is removed and the limits inherent to embodiment are no longer directly challenged. Burke lists things which are sublime: obscurity, where darkness and uncertainty arouse dread and terror (part II, section III); power, where the mind is impelled to fear because of superior force (part II, section V); privation, such as darkness, vacuity, and silence, which are great because they are terrible (part II, section VI); vastness, whether in length, height, or depth, the last being the most powerful source of the sublime (part II, section VII); infinity, or any object that because of its size seems infinite (part II, section VIII); difficulty—that is, any object that seems to owe its existence to a vast expenditure of labor and effort (part II, section XII); and magnificence (part II, section XIII) (see *E*, pp. 39–40). All of

these are excessive attributes of sublime objects or scenes, and each of them threatens *vision,* and *not* the body. It is the vision, perhaps even of physical violence, but not a pain in the body, which provokes the sublime.

The text's strong association of the sublime with darkness is analyzed in detail in the disquisition on light, color, and the sublime in section XIV, "Light," and section XVI of part II, "Colour considered as productive of the Sublime." Light and its opposite, darkness, can both produce the sublime, but only when each is in blinding excess; darkness is also determined to be more conducive to producing the sublime.[27] Given Burke's general preference for melancholy, it is not surprising that cheerful or bright colors are thought inappropriate to sublime images which are better rendered in "sad and fuscous colours, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like" (*E,* pp. 81–82). As Neil Hertz has stated in another context, the sublime is like the "black on black" at the end of the line.[28]

Burke's passionate defense of the natural connection between darkness and terror leads him into a lengthy refutation of Locke's ideas concerning darkness, most notably his contention "that darkness is not naturally an idea of terror; and that, though an excessive light is painful to the sense, that the greatest excess of darkness is no ways troublesome" (*E,* p. 143).[29] If this were the case, the only possible cause of connecting darkness with the sublime would be the tainting of a "natural" association[30] of the two by one that is "superstitious" (for instance, ideas of ghosts and goblins). "It is very hard to imagine," he says, "that the effect of an idea so universally terrible in all times, and in all countries, as darkness, could possibly have been owing to a set of idle stories, or to any cause of a nature so trivial, and of an operation so precarious" (*E,* pp. 143–144).[31]

Darkness is terrible before all association with particular things. To support his point, Burke recounts the story of Mr. Cheselden, a surgeon who removes a young boy's cataracts and restores his sight. Given that the boy has been blind since birth, Burke argues that his reactions to darkness, or to blackness, can be taken as entirely "natural." The boy had seen a black object and felt "great uneasiness" which was succeeded by horror a few months later "upon accidentally seeing a negro woman" (*E,* p. 144). Burke feels that this horror stems from a natural inclination to be frightened by anything dark—or, rather, anything *black,* as it is the purpose of this and the subsequent section to extend Burke's aesthetic judgments of darkness to blackness in general (e.g., see part IV, sec. XVII, "The effects of BLACKNESS"). The passage is very important, and I will quote from it at length:

> I must observe, that the ideas of darkness and blackness are much the same; and they differ only in this, that blackness is a more confined idea. Mr. Cheselden has given us a very curious story of a boy, who had been born blind, and continued so until he was thirteen or fourteen years old; he was then couched for a cataract, by which operation he received his sight. Among many remarkable particulars that attended his first perceptions, and judgments on visual objects, Cheselden tells us, that the first time the boy saw a black object, it gave him great uneasiness; and that some time after, upon accidentally seeing a negro woman, he was struck with great horror at the sight. The horror, in this case, can scarcely be supposed to arise from any association. The boy appears by the account to have been particularly observing, and sensible for one of his age: and therefore, it is probable, if the great uneasiness he felt at the first sight of black had arisen from its connexion with any other disagreeable ideas, he would have observed and mentioned it. For an idea, disagreeable only by association, has the cause of its ill effect on the passions evident enough at the first impression; in ordinary cases, it is indeed frequently lost; but this is, because the original association was made very early, and the consequent impression repeated often. In our instance, there was no time for such an habit; and there is no reason to think, that the ill effects of black on his imagination were more owing to its connexion with any disagreeable ideas, than that the good effects of more cheerful colours were derived from their connexion with pleasing ones. *They had both probably their effect from their natural operation.* (*E,* pp. 144–145; my emphasis)

According to Burke, the boy's horror at the sight of a black woman is purely owing to his extreme fear of "darkness." After considering various corporeal and mental causes of the discomfort Burke claims is associated with blackness, he explains that the pains originally felt in the effects of black do subside—particularly as we become accustomed to them. It then seems that

our horror or pain in the experience of blackness is simply because we are not *used* to black: "Custom reconciles us to every thing. After we have been used to the sight of black objects, the terror abates ... yet the nature of the original impression still continues." Black "will always have something melancholy in it" because we will always find the change from black to other colors "too violent" (*E,* pp. 148–149). Only when the thing ceases to be new, when its shock value has diminished, will the horror evoked by its (natural?!) associations subside.

Burke's discussion of the Cheselden example provides an excellent allegory for the politics of vision and power, and raises again the difficult issue of race and gender in discussions of aesthetic experience. If we return to the issue of the "unsteady gaze," what might the boy's horror signify within Burke's account of sublime vision; what does it mean for the steady eye which has, until the rupture signified by the black female, struggled to govern the *Enquiry*? It may be worth speculating that in Burke's account the threat to the boy centers upon the provocation of a *reactive* (and not controlling) stance in him, aligning him with the passivity of the feminine, here given the added iconic valence of subordination through slavery. Burke's categorization of black as terrible *in itself* (by *nature*) may be interpreted, in this example, as an attempt to control the signification of the black and the feminine for the masculine gaze, by asserting that this reaction is natural and unavoidable and would not put the (ultimate) agency or power of the boy into question. The boy may be in the process of mastering—or becoming accustomed to—his physiological reactions, but he is clearly not (yet) able to contain the "effects of blackness" (blackness as a mark of race, but also as a mark of the feminine which is abject if it is not "beautiful").

If the Cheselden example is read as an allegory of Burke's own drama of blindness and insight, the example of the black female *also* makes Burke's earlier attempts to maintain the masculine nature of the sublime somewhat incoherent. The black female, by virtue of her association with darkness—and the cultural association of darkness (and the feminine) with the irrational—threatens the power or integrity of the boy's gaze (the boy here is standing in as the "typical" potential subject of aesthetic experience), just as she threatens Burke's own "naturalistic" premises. Commenting on Burke's use of the black female as an example of the natural effects of blackness, W. J. T. Mitchell points out that she is a "doubled figure of slavery, of both sexual and racial servitude" which is here made to appear "in the natural colors of power and sublimity." Burke, Mitchell claims, here confuses "sensory, aesthetic signals," with "the 'natural' orders of gender, social class, and symbolic modes."[32] As such an incongruous mixture, it may be added, she becomes the point at which Burke's analysis breaks, and is *then* sublime because she represents a point of contradiction, a lack of intelligibility, in Burke's aesthetic discourse itself.[33] In response to Burke's claim that blackness naturally provokes horror, Sir Joshua Reynolds raised the objection that judgments of beauty were relative, suggesting that they were also more "local" than universal:

> I suppose nobody will doubt, if one of their Painters was to paint the Goddess of Beauty, but that he would represent her black, with thick lips, flat nose, and woolly hair; and, it seems to me, he would act very unnaturally if he did not: For by what criterion will any one dispute the propriety of his idea? We, indeed, say that the form and colour of the European is preferable to that of the Aethiopian; but I know of no reason we have for it, but that we are more accustomed to it. It is absurd to say, that beauty is possessed of attractive powers, which irresistibly seize the corresponding mind with love and admiration, since that argument is equally conclusive in favour of the white and the black philosopher.[34]

The black female continued to provoke speculations such as these, and not simply about her aesthetic qualities but also about the relationship between her "look," her anatomy, and her sexuality. Nineteenth-century images of the black female produced in Europe and Britain emphasized her (the black female was often equated with the Hottentot) grotesque nature as well as her (pathological) lasciviousness; the black female is represented, in both physical form and alleged desire, as a monstrous creature.[35] As such, she becomes the site for another form of the sublime, one which draws upon the lure of her abjection, and the thrill which is not contained within the polite society of the sexes imagined by Burke. True to his wish to classify

the effects of objects as beautiful or sublime, however, she also serves as a stereotype of difference, a collecting pool for all that is imagined as excessive to the ideology of Burke's aesthetic.

III. "THE PARAMOUR MAY ADORN HIMSELF AS HE PLEASES": KANT AND THE BEARDED LADY[36]

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* attempts to thoroughly isolate "pure" judgments of beauty and sublimity from all of the secondary considerations (now called "interests") which had troubled Burke. In order to do this, Kant isolates the sublime within the fortress of the faculties ("bodies" in the mind) themselves; this seclusion only comes, however, after an extended exploration of the dispositions toward aesthetic experience consequent to gender and national affiliation. Before the *Critique of Judgement* is the less well-known precritical aesthetic philosophy, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763), first published only six years after Burke's *Enquiry.* Kant's discussion of forms of difference between the beautiful and the sublime in *Observations* bear striking resemblance to the tone of Burke's own, especially in the attention Kant gives to the analogical relationships between these aesthetic "feelings" and gender. Kant, however, extends Burke's inchoate references to the "effects of blackness" and peoples of "duskier complexions" to an elaborate typing of national characteristics according to the propensity of different national subjects for beautiful or sublime feelings. The difference between Kant and Burke is also apparent, however, in Kant's emphasis on the importance of the *disposition,* rather than in the "nature of external things."[37] Of course, since the beautiful and the sublime are, in fact, dispositions *of* "external things" or bodies which themselves are judged to partake of beauty or sublimity to various degrees and kinds (i.e., the sublime American Indian or Arab), the distinction is somewhat blurred.

This difference between his own aesthetic philosophy and that of Burke's has the odd effect of allowing Kant to later sort through the capacities of different personalities, sexes, and national characters on the basis of the relative abilities of each to experience the beautiful and the sublime. Thus, while in the third *Critique* the ability to make pure aesthetic judgments serves as a basis upon which to separate philistines from civilized subjects, here it aids more blatant classificatory purposes. Kant will, from these amazingly homogeneous dispositions for aesthetic experience (one would think there were more varieties of feeling than the pleasure and pain associated only with the beautiful and three kinds of sublime), sort through melancholics, phlegmatics, cholerics, females, males, Italians, Germans, Englishmen, and Indians. One might regard the *Observations* as a classificatory chart of all the *impure* aesthetic judgments, those tainted with material or other interests as well as the perceptual and corporeal matrices provided by cultural constructions of gender, race, and nation.

Prior to his separation of the sublime into the mathematical and dynamical, which will be retained in the third *Critique,* Kant gives a tripartite scheme:

> The sublime [like the beautiful] is in turn of different kinds. Its feeling is sometimes accompanied with a certain dread, or melancholy; in some cases merely with quiet wonder; and in still others with a beauty completely pervading a sublime plan. The first I shall call the *terrifying sublime*, the second the *noble,* and the third the *splendid.* Deep loneliness is sublime, but in a way that stirs terror. Hence great far-reaching solitudes, like the colossal Komul Desert in Tartary, have always given us occasion for peopling them with fearsome spirits, goblins, and ghouls. (*O,* p. 48)

Having divided the sublime into the terrifying, noble, and splendid, Kant then simply names what is associated with beauty (e.g., things delicate or pleasing) and the sublime (things strong, often tragic). In the course of one such list, Kant says, "[i]n fact, dark coloring and black eyes are more closely related to the sublime, blue eyes and blonde coloring to the beautiful" (*O,* p. 54). From this observation, he blithely proceeds to others on proper apparel which, although they read like advice from a fashion column, are part of Kant's general point that sublimity is an effect of morality and principle in a person (despite the need for careful dress):

> and in all the points suggested, even the costumes must accord with this distinction of feeling. Great, portly persons must observe simplicity, or at most, splendor, in their apparel; the little can be adorned

and embellished. For age, darker colors and uniformity in apparel are seemly; youth radiates through lighter colored and vividly contrasting garments. Among the classes with similar power and rank, the cleric must exhibit the greatest simplicity, the statesmen the most splendor. The paramour may adorn himself as he pleases. (*O*, p. 54)

Here aesthetic concerns are, to a large extent, an intricate part of social distinctions, implying that knowledge of this rudimentary fashion system is integral to assuming an intelligible and legitimate position in the social world. Each should dress according to physical type (portly or little), age, "power and rank," although "[t]he paramour may adorn himself as he pleases," presumably because the paramour typically has either little regard for such regulations of dress or exists in order to flaunt them and the hierarchy they support.

From fashion, Kant eventually moves to the analogies between the beautiful and the sublime and the female and the male. Beauty, he says, is accomplished "without painful toil," whereas "strivings and surmounted difficulties arouse admiration and belong to the sublime" (*O*, p. 78). Kant's observations here quickly become prescriptive, barring women from certain activities which are sublime and therefore too *manly*. The difficulties of reflection are not proper to a woman, whose "unconstrained charms should show nothing else than a beautiful nature." Beauty and charm are the source of her "great power over the other sex":

Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex. ... A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mme Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise de Chatelet, might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strains. (*O*, p. 78)

Only when age has destroyed her beauty should a woman seek the sublimity implied by education, "and the husband should be the first instructor" (*O*, p. 92).[38] Again, Kant's admonishments are aimed toward what he conceives to be the morality and virtue inherent in the sublime male and his complementary (but uneducated) beautiful female. Having a beard is, of course, meant to indicate masculinity, but the choice of something which is incidental, more or less easily cultivated or removed, indicates that the learning is equally ephemeral. (It might also, if taken as an unintentional[?] irony, indicate the performative nature of masculinity in the context in which the text is written.)

Most interesting of all is the fourth section of *Observations,* "Of National Characteristics,* so far as They Depend upon the Distinct Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime." The asterisk indicates a qualification: "My intention," Kant says, "is not at all to portray the characters of peoples in detail, but I sketch only a few features that express the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful which they show" (apparently concerned about the "justice" of such a broad physiology of feelings, Kant assures the reader that there are always exceptions). No one should take offense; the blame for lack of finer feelings in one nation can be shifted to others—the offended reader can "hit it like a ball to his neighbor."[39] Kant also states that he will not be concerned here with a genealogy of the national differences as products of different types of historical circumstance or climate, in the tradition of Montesquieu.

Section four is still, however, reminiscent of other contemporary interests in typologies of national character and racial difference, and the expression of national character in the arts and sciences.[40] Kant was perhaps aware that in his essay "Of National Characters" David Hume had written—perhaps without humor—of Berkeley's calculus of national character based on comparisons of "southern wits to cucumbers" and "northern geniuses" to melons. Kant's conception of "national" aesthetic feeling may be compared as well to discussions of "national literatures" which would only increase in the nineteenth century. But if, as Nancy Stepan has observed, racial *metaphors* become confused with universal categories of biological sciences, then the attention Kant gives to distinctions among "national characters" on the basis of their *aesthetic* feeling or disposition seems to be the locus of his peculiar blindness *and* insight, in distinction from other philosophers. Although he claims in *Observations* that "races" and "nations" (both of which are in perpetual construction and reconstruction as he writes) have *dispositions* toward certain aesthetic feelings, Kant will later try to isolate aesthetic concerns from

such cultural, racial, or national impurities that prejudice pure aesthetic judgment. But in the *Observations,* his supposition of racial or national bases for aesthetic judgment, and their importance for aesthetic philosophy, is preparatory to the systematic incorporation of metaphorical racial differences into "science." His erasure of the nationalistic or cultural bases of aesthetic judgment in his later work, and the effort to distinguish pure and impure judgments, prefigures the hiddenness of aesthetic and metaphorical ("non-scientific") constructions of difference in dominant discourses of race and gender in the nineteenth century.

Of all possible intellectual contexts, the *Observations* appears to be a response to Hume's essays "Of National Characters" (1742) and "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757).[41] The important difference between them is, of course, that Kant endeavors to base these differences in a specifically *aesthetic* philosophy, and to distinguish among nations (and races) on the basis of aesthetic feeling. In "Of National Characters," Hume expends much of his intellectual energy on the difficulties of ascribing a causal relationship between climate and character, and leaves aesthetic questions to a separate essay, "Of the Standard of Taste." Kant, however, brushes aside the question of climate, and not only establishes a general aesthetic philosophy of the beautiful and the sublime, but proceeds to *use* this aesthetic to classify nations according to aesthetic (and moral) dispositions.

His opening statement gives something of the flavor of this section of *Observations*:

> Of the peoples of our part of the world, in my opinion those who distinguish themselves among all others by the feeling of the beautiful are the Italians and the French, but by the feeling for the sublime, the Germans, English, and Spanish. Holland can be considered as the land where the finer taste becomes largely unnoticeable. (*O,* p. 97)

The phrase "peoples of our part of the world" refers to Europeans, but it also indicates that Kant's aesthetic physiologies grow from his life in Königsberg, whose eighteenth-century population was "extremely diversified, having Polish, Russian, Scandinavian, Dutch, and English segments, in addition to the predominating German and earlier Slavic portions."[42] Kant's judgments on non-European peoples, discussed later in the section, are based on his knowledge of travel writing and news reports. American Indians, for instance, were brought to Europe for show, and Kant later mentions Attakullaculla, a Cherokee brought by Sir Alexander Cuming to England in 1730.[43]

"National character" expresses the sublime as either terrifying, noble, or splendid. Tastes for each kind of sublimity, as well as for the beautiful, are "not original by nature" (*O,* p. 98). Although he does not tell us how he knows, Kant believes that he has "reason to be able to ascribe" the feeling of the terrifying to "the Spaniard," the splendid to "the Englishman," and the noble to "the German." From these initial observations, a calculus of tastes is elaborated, comparing the European nations to each other. Thus, for instance, the German retains a middle ground between the taste for the sublime of the English and the respect for the beautiful characteristic of the splendid French. "[T]he taste of nations" becomes apparent in their arts and sciences—but Kant does not make clear whether his qualification "not original by nature" also means that the taste of nations is *cultivated* by the arts and sciences.

The remaining passages of section four elaborate the tastes for beauty and sublimity in the European countries of Spain, Italy, France, England, Germany, and Holland. At the end of the section, a "fleeting glance" is cast "over the other parts of the world." It is here that we find generalizations about the tastes of Arabs, Japanese, Chinese, "Negroes of Africa," and North American "savages." What had previously been said of the Spanish and French is here applied to Arabs and Persians, in whose national character the European traits are magnified and excessive. Thus, the Arabs : Spanish :: Persians : French :: Japanese : Englishmen, with the Indians and Chinese so enchanted by the grotesque as to elude European classificatory categories altogether, and the African having "by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling" (*O,* p. 110).[44] The following passage contains the analogies, and suggests that there are two typologies at work: first, the dominant types of Europeans and, secondly, those oriental types who are dimmer or distorted reflections of beautiful (or even sublime) Europeans:

[W]e find the Arab the noblest man in the Orient, yet of a feeling that degenerates very much into the adventurous. ... his narrative and history and on the whole his feeling are always interwoven with some wonderful thing. His inflamed imagination presents things to him in unnatural and distorted images, and even the propagation of his religion was a great adventure. If the Arabs are, so to speak, the Spaniards of the Orient, similarly the Persians are the French of Asia. They are good poets, courteous, and of fairly fine taste. (*O,* pp. 109–110)

Kant's ensuing description of the tastes of Indians and Chinese as "grotesque" anticipates, however ironically, Victor Hugo's redefinition, in the "Preface to Cromwell,"[45] of the sublime as participating in the grotesque.[46] Hugo's illustration of this grotesque sublimity is evident not only in his novels but in various poems in *Les Orientales* which equate the sublimity of the Orient with its monstrous idols and other grotesques. Kant's complete dismissal of "Negroes" as lacking any finer feeling, and thus retaining perhaps the lowest spot in this hierarchy of racially or nationally based tastes, is often repeated in later aesthetic comments comparing various nations, for instance at European and American fairs and expositions in the nineteenth century.[47] American Indians rate second only to the African Negro, it appears, in their capacity for "finer feelings." While Kant feels the Cherokee Attakullaculla is equal to the finest Greek in his sense of honor, he judges American Indians on the whole to be lacking in "feeling for the beautiful in moral understanding," and generally apathetic (*O,* p. 112).

Kant's views on national character are elaborated in a collection of lectures, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1797).[48] Here, Kant makes the European standard implicit in his hierarchical schema manifest by stating that, in the case of the Spaniard, the good side of his national character, "born of the mixture of European with Arabic (Moorish) blood," is attributable to his European ancestry. The Arabic blood, however, is responsible for his less admirable characteristics (many of which, it may be observed, could be attributed to European countries and characters in 1797):

His worse side is: that he does not learn from foreigners, that he does not travel to get acquainted with other peoples; that he is centuries behind in the sciences; that he is dead set against any reform; that he is proud of not having to work; that he has a romantic turn of spirit, as the bullfight shows, and that he is cruel, as the erstwhile *Auto de fe* proves, and shows, in his taste, his partly non-European origin.[49]

From such generalizations about moral character and fine sentiment, based as they are on travel books, gossip, and the reports of others "from the most ancient and fabled times," Kant moves to a comparison of Europeans and these "other parts of the world" with regard to "the relation of the sexes." Here, of course, the Europeans remain superior in their floral decoration of sensual charm (the feminine), and the interlacing of (feminine) beauty with morality (a task in the service of which Kant has devoted his *Observations*). A notable exception remains in "the savages of Canada" who may surpass "even our civilized part of the world" (*O,* p. 113) because they actually give "the feminine sex" the right to "exercise authority." Women "assemble and deliberate upon the most important regulations of the nation ... and generally it is their voices that determines the decision." Kant observes that their authority, however, burdens them not only with domestic concerns but also with "the hardships of the men" (*O* p. 114), so that their gain at the hand of these sublime dispositions is not entirely clear.

In concluding the fourth section, Kant abandons the lesson of the Canadian savages and limits his remarks to "the taste of men" and its historical variations from "ancient times" until the present day. These he offers in a brief allegory of the fall from classical, finer tastes in the beautiful and the sublime to decadent Roman appetites for "false glitter." The glitter is succeeded by "a certain perverted taste called the Gothic," which he attributes to "the barbarians," and which becomes historically "discharged" in the grotesque (*O* p. 114). Henceforth, grotesqueries multiplied and created a "coarsened feeling" promoted by the "unnatural forms" of false arts. The grotesque is "exaggerated or trifling" when compared to the noble simplicity of ancient tastes in beauty. The sublime becomes degraded in "adventures"—and here we refer back to Kant's description of Spaniards as sublime primarily in an adventurous sense, and realize that the degraded forms of taste exist "around

us" in the present world of nations. Kant, however, is gesturing toward the Crusades and their unfortunate effect on religion which itself "became distorted by miserable grotesqueries." From the corruption of religion, all else is lost until Kant's own day when, once again, "sound taste" in the beautiful and noble returns in both arts and sciences, and in morality.

In this sweeping (and cantankerous) history of taste, the narrative on nations and national dispositions has been put aside. The text asserts that a uniformity of sound taste has returned to a particular time in history, when in fact the suppression of various (imagined) national tastes—of which the Indian and Chinese have been classed as grotesque—is the aim of the text's closing remarks:

> Nothing now is more to be desired than that the false glitter, which so easily deceives, should not remove us unawares from noble simplicity; but especially that the as yet undiscovered secret of education be rescued from the old illusions, in order early to elevate the moral feeling in the breast of every young world-citizen to a lively sensitivity, so that all delicacy of feeling may not amount to merely the fleeting and idle enjoyment of judging, with more or less taste, what goes around us. (*O*, pp. 115–116)

"*The* moral feeling" requires "*a*" finer taste, which apparently rests on something more permanent than idle perceptions of what goes on around "us" (Europeans, presumably). Despite the many idle, armchair traveler observations Kant himself has offered, often in bad taste, of such apparently homogeneous cultural groups as "Persians," "Indians," "Chinese," and "Canadian savages," Kant retreats from his own comparative historical and cultural aesthetic to offer a master-narrative which had governed the *Observations* all along. The "old illusions" of false and grotesque art—in which some Asian tastes participate—must be cast off, in favor of what will, in the third *Critique,* struggle to become universal bases for aesthetic judgment. The "exotics" (which begin with the sublime southern Europeans, and proceed to Asians and North Americans) are grotesque aberrations of beauty and sublimity to be subordinated, and perhaps eliminated, in the hearts of new "world-citizens." And in order to do this, the exotic bodies which had populated Kant's precritical aesthetic philosophy must now be made to disappear.

In the *Critique of Judgement,* these bodies are stripped of their national characteristics and feelings, and made to play in the gendered roles of reason and imagination. The sublime becomes a moment in which reason attempts, with the aid of the imagination, to represent the unpresentable—to give expression to the noumena. For Kant, obviously, the unpresentable is not quite the same opportunity for celebration it has become among postmodern critics. For Lyotard, the "unpresentable" is a mark of the "postmodern sublime"; fascination with it defines the postmodern condition as one of perpetual play or of an infinite language game in which the "object" never "appears" or can never be part of a vision of totality.[50] What is now imagined as a "transnational" network of objects and imagined worlds,[51] or a collage of cultural artifacts, has become part of the stock and trade of postmodern sublimity. For Kant, however, it appears that the confusion of national characteristics and aesthetic feeling must be repressed in favor of an abstract aesthetic mechanism for calculating *universal* experiences of the beautiful and the sublime.

The sublime is "unpresentable"—it does not resolve into any particular object or representation. Because of this, it is a source of deep anxiety for the imagination which seeks to represent the ideas of infinity, magnitude, or power associated with the sublime in an image. Presumably, this anxiety is not brought about by the erasure of particular national characters presented in the earlier *Observations.* The American Indian, the Arab, or the Englishman who had previously held dispositions toward the beautiful or the sublime having been replaced by a general or universal intelligence, the sublime in the *Critique* is no longer an adjective for a "nation" or "race," and its more general nature causes a less specific anxiety than Chinese or Indian grotesques. Rather, sublimity typically occurs in the *Critique* when the imagination experiences extreme terror and awe at the power and magnitude of "natural" phenomena. These moments are most likely to arise when the mind contemplates scenes of nature's majesty—great oceans, mountains, storms—though they may also be provoked by more properly "cultural" phenomena such as pyramids,[52] the bravery of soldiers,

or even war itself. Such images, however, are "too big" and also "not big enough": they terrify at the same time that it is impossible for them to match the idea of infinity, might, or totality which they stir in the subject. They are inadequate images, although they refer (negatively) to that which is more powerful than the imaginative presentation of an object. At the same time, after reading *Observations,* we see that they are also symptomatic of an erasure of cultural, national, and gender-based differences which had previously been a more prominent part of Kant's discussion of the sublime.

The sublime in the third *Critique* becomes distinct from that of precursors such as Burke to the extent that, in pure judgments of beauty and sublimity, Kant emphasizes the subject's response to the object rather than any quality of the object itself *and* because he has ceased to "nationalize" the various imaginations and tastes of the subject he describes. Instead, he creates "the subject of aesthetic experience" whose disposition is not spoken of as part of a particular national or racial group, and whose experience (presumably based upon a collage of experiences to be had in German, French, and English art and literature at the end of the eighteenth century) is put forth as universal.

Kant's emphasis on the aesthetic response joins the sublime to an element of the supersensible in the subject, providing a legitimate basis for aesthetic and moral judgments. Somewhat fortuitously, this inward turning also takes him away from the difficult matters of sublimity provoked by cultural difference, and the sense that beauty and sublimity are produced by "national" traits or sentiments. Likewise, he is able to ignore the implication that "tastes" in transcendent beings, as referred to in his remarks on the grotesque and idolatrous religions of Asia in *Observations,* may be created in particular cultural milieus. The link with the supersensible is expressed in his division between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime: whereas the mathematical sublime entertains the idea of *infinity,* the dynamical sublime concerns notions of "might," "power," and "dominion." Emblems of sublimity, through their negation, provoke reflexive moments in which Reason supersedes the imagination and presents the idea of nature in its "totality." The natural image at hand is encompassed within a supersensible idea[53] of the coherence of the scene or its purpose within a context larger than the immediate and negative threat of nature's power or magnitude—or the trifling singularity of sensible images. Translated to the prior aesthetic physiology of nations in *Observations,* however, the motion of "encompassing" the threat in nature, or the sensible, might obviously extend itself to an imperial gesture of incorporating the adventurous Arab, or other sublime characters in the world of nations, by pointing elsewhere, to a supersensible totality from which judgments of taste draw their universal character and ultimate legitimacy.

Neil Hertz reads this moment of suspension (or "blockage") within the mathematical sublime as a product of "sheer cognitive exhaustion": "the mind [is] blocked not by the threat of an overwhelming force [as in the dynamical sublime], but by the fear of losing count or of being reduced to nothing but counting—this and this and this—with no hope of bringing a long series or a vast scattering under some sort of conceptual unity." The momentary "checking of the powers" which results from the "fear of losing count" gives way to a "compensatory" movement, "the mind's exultation in its own rational faculties, in its ability to think a totality that cannot be taken in through the senses."[54]

> The sublime may be described in this way: It is an object (of nature) the *representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas.*
>
> In a literal sense and according to their logical import, ideas cannot be presented. But if we enlarge our empirical faculty of representation (mathematical or dynamical) with a view to the intuition of nature, reason inevitably steps forward, as the faculty concerned with the independence of the absolute totality, and calls forth the effort of the mind, unavailing though it be, to make the representation of sense adequate to this totality. This effort, and the feeling of the unattainability of the idea by means of imagination, is itself a representation of the subjective finality of our mind in its employment of the imagination in the interests of the mind's supersensible province, and compels us subjectively to *think* nature itself in its totality as a presentation of something supersensible, without our being able to effectuate this presentation *objectively.*[55]

Perhaps Kant himself grew tired of "counting"

national types, and abandoned them for higher, more ephemeral, nonbodies; the national types of the *Observations* may be understood, then, as the initial and inevitably inadequate phenomenal representations of a process which must necessarily transcend the body. In the sublime moment, the imagination submits to reason, and through its failure, compels reason to think the totality. The imagination mediates between "nature" and reason, assuring the superiority of the mind of man (ideality) over all natural phenomena (materiality, the feminine, the irrational, other races and nations). Contemplation of sublime objects and landscapes, when one is safe from harm, is an opportunity to explore fear itself. At the same time that the sublime provokes a feeling of terror and astonishment, it stimulates an imaginative attempt to assert superiority over internal and external nature:

> [D]elight in the sublime in nature is only *negative* ... the feeling of imagination by its own act depriving itself of its freedom by receiving a final determination in accordance with a law other than that of its empirical employment. In this way it gains an extension and a might greater than that which it sacrifices. But the ground of this is concealed from it, and in its place it *feels* the sacrifice or deprivation, as well as its cause, to which it is subjected. The *astonishment* amounting almost to terror, the awe and thrill of devout feeling, that takes hold of one when gazing upon the prospect of mountains ascending to heaven, deep ravines and torrents raging there, deep-shadowed solitudes that invite to brooding melancholy, and the like—all this, when we are assured of our own safety, is not actual fear. Rather is it an attempt to gain access to it through imagination, for the purpose of feeling the might of this faculty in combining the movement of the mind thereby aroused with its serenity, and of thus being superior to internal, and therefore, to external, nature, so far as the latter can have any bearing upon our feeling of well-being.[56]

The import of the sublime for the imagination is that it enables an experience which ultimately elicits a failure which is also a submission to a law of reason which is higher than the material/body upon which it preys (which also exceeds the visceral realities of individual desire and fear). "The imagination," as Forest Pyle expresses it, "remains caught between a 'nature' that it exceeds and the play of a 'reason' that it emulates but cannot realize."[57] It might seem that a distinctive feature of the sublime of the third *Critique* is that it inevitably rationalizes *away* the threat (or the subversive promise!) of the vision of foreign bodies confronted in the *Observations.* Just as the imagination attempts to surpass nature at the very moment it most fears materiality, the third *Critique* erases the earlier imagination of nationality in terms of the sublime in order to envision a totality which is not dependent upon the hazardous contingencies embodied by Spaniards, paramours, and bearded ladies. The imagination's impasse in the third *Critique* might then be read as indicative of a larger failure to articulate the ideological processes by which an aesthetic totality emerges to repair the ruptures created within an increasingly fragmented, inchoate, and global network of cultures, images, and signs.

IV. "AN AMPUTATION, AN EXCISION, A HEMORRHAGE"

Burke's *Enquiry* mobilizes a fascination with the physiological effects of images, colors, and light upon vision, and with the relationship between the events or experiences of the body and states of mind. Throughout, and especially in part IV, Burke describes an education of the mind through bodily experiences of various passions; working sometimes from very simple physiological observations, the training of the eye becomes an ordering of passion and the subordination of crude reactions to the discipline of proper aesthetic appreciation. Inevitably, given the "obvious" primacy of observations of the human body and the landscapes in which it moves, his discussion of "natural" physiological reactions becomes closely linked to the production of particular kinds of (embodied) responses to images of sex and race. Experiences and expressions of love, like those of terror, reflect the perpetual education of vision necessary to the orders of beauty and sublimity. Similarly, Kant's *Observations* is preoccupied with the classification of national types according to their dispositions, these in turn contributing not only to their capacities for aesthetic experience but to their own performance as noble, terrifying, and splendid emblems of the sublime. The pedagogy contained in these aesthetic treatises becomes especially striking when compared to

later discussions of the effects of racial stereotyping upon the "black bodies" which "are but as so many vacant spaces dispersed among the objects we view" (*E*, p. 147). In other words, these bodies are those which remain (alternatively, are repressed as) unintelligible and sublime not only according to the rhetoric of Burke's *Enquiry*, but as they are also translated (in however indirect a manner) into discussions of race in other media. Aesthetic ideology has, then, an oppressive political force which is inscribed on the flesh it marks as other, and it is in resistance to this force that the aesthetic might be subverted from within. While addressing the production of racial stereotypes, Frantz Fanon and bell hooks each tell of experiences of children or of childhood which allegorize the construction of sublime visions, and in their visceral recollections they invoke the panic and uncertainty of the "innocent" gaze assumed in the *Enquiry*, and its cantankerous counterpart in the *Observations*.

In his essay "The Fact of Blackness," Fanon articulates the "difficulties in the development of [a] bodily schema" which "the man of color" encounters in "the white world." Fanon gives voice to the dialectical development of stereotypes of race and gender which lurk on the other side of the sublime "effects of blackness" described by Burke. Fanon argues that the bodily schema[58] is undergirded by a historico-racial schema which produces experiences of alienation from the body, experiences marked by the judgments of whites in facing "the fact of blackness" in another's skin. Fanon's description of his experience of a child's frightened reaction to him can be used as an effective counterexample to Burke's claim that the "effects of blackness" are entirely "natural," and to the blindness of the *Enquiry* to the broader effect of the aesthetic experience he is constructing:

> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but the laughter had become impossible.[59]

Fanon then tells of the nausea consequent upon his "discovery" of his blackness, and of the process by which *he made himself an object.* This process is metaphorically described as amputation and dismemberment:

> I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness ... and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."
>
> On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men.[60]

In these passages, the effects of the other's gaze, allegorized in the example of the frightened child or in Burke's attribution of terrible sublimity in the Cheselden example, are not only aesthetic or psychological but involve as well the destruction—here, a forceful revision—of the other's body. The moments of terror and sublimity are used to inscribe and thereby to "revise, thematize" the body of the other, in these cases the "black body," in stereotypes of racial difference. The "stereotype" is imagined as the process of making oneself an object for an other, covering himself with his own blood so that his body will match the obscure iconic references indicated by tom-toms, cannibalism, and "Sho' good eatin'." In other experiences of the white man's judgment, Fanon describes his body as "given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, *clad in mourning* in that white winter day."[61] As Burke had claimed, the aesthetic gaze (whose power is masked, and possibly occluded, in the innocent terror of the boy blind since birth) attributes melancholy and sadness to dark colors.[62] For Fanon, to be "clad in mourning" is to be marked *as* "black" against a surrounding whiteness, interpellated as terror, "sublime," or abject within the ideology of the white aesthetic.

bell hooks writes of what might be called "the effects of whiteness" in her own experience. hooks describes "black" perceptions of "whites" as if the groups were homogeneous, in this way hoping to defamiliarize even the stereotypical ascription of the experience of terror to whites in various hearts of darkness. She also, however, recognizes that individuals in both groups could

come to *see* (and to resist) her stereotypes of "whites." hooks invokes a sense of sublimity as a terror of "whiteness," but unlike Burke she is interested in reading terror as a product of racial apartheid, lived like second nature but still a product of a social text which she might re-inhabit and subvert:[63]

> Looking past stereotypes to consider various representations of whiteness in the black imagination, I appeal to memory, to my earliest recollections of ways these issues were raised in black life. Returning to memories of growing up in the social circumstances created by racial apartheid, to all black spaces on the edges of town, I re-inhabit a location where black folks associated whiteness with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing. White people were regarded as terrorists, especially those who dared to enter that segregated space of blackness.[64]

hooks wishes to examine critically "the association of whiteness as terror in the black imagination." Deconstructing this association also displays the impact of racism and breaks its hold; "[w]e decolonize our minds and our imaginations."

These passages from Fanon and hooks, especially when set in the critical context of the Cheselden example, give a powerful sense of the complex relationships between aesthetics and the politics of gender and race, and offer possible strategies for countering dominant Euro-aesthetic visions of beauty and sublimity. My analysis suggests agreement with W. J. T. Mitchell's view that Burke's attribution of liveliness to "oriental languages" or horror to "blackness" and "darkness" is not so much indicative of the mechanics of hearing and vision but is part of the political rhetoric that is embedded in Burke's aesthetic theory.[65] Which is not to say that such an oppositional discourse does more than begin to see beyond the force it resists, but both hooks and Fanon suggest that such resistance begins at the deeply visceral level both indicated and annulled in the *Enquiry.*

V. A "FACE PURPLE WITH SUNS"

In James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time,* Uncle James writes a letter from prison to his nephew in order to explain his "dispute with his country." Wishing to tell the nephew of crimes which have destroyed not only his father but countless others, James asserts that while it is necessary to become "tough and philosophical concerning death and destruction ... it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent" for it is the "innocence which constitutes the crime."[66] Recognizing their transgression requires awareness that they are "trapped in a history which they do not understand," and which demands that they "believe ... for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men." But not all white men believe this; those who know otherwise cannot act because they *fear the dangers* of commitment. Perhaps to explain the predicament of whites, caught between false innocence and the danger of acting on what they know, Uncle asks his nephew to envision their fear:

> Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.[67]

"You do not be afraid," admonishes Uncle. The killing intention of whites, to make him "perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go behind the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name," have already been defeated and turned against them by a "terrible law, a terrible paradox" by which the innocents "who believed that your imprisonment made them safe are losing their grasp of reality."[68]

Uncle imagines the white man's fear, his terror in facing the possibility that the black man could act freely, could define and name himself. In Burke's aesthetic, imagining terror had been part of an aesthetic ideology which gave a place, a "sense of one's own reality," to a subject whose "free submission" to a social order demanded the regulation of desire and the repression of difference. In Baldwin's allegory, imagining terror becomes a form of resistance to an order which confines black men to the "ghettos" of white fear—a terror of all that ruptures the "order of nature" created to keep darkness in its place.

Moving out of order, this imagination makes terror its own, obscuring the distinctions between heaven and earth, shaking the foundations of the universe.

The potential rupture of aesthetic discourse resides in allegories such as these, which address and subvert the demand for sublime power from within the fear which makes it necessary. Rendering this fear as innocent—a "natural" reaction, the response of a "child" to the effects of blackness—gives discourses of sublimity an insidious destructive force. In Uncle's letter, the death or resolution of fear in the ghettoization of abject, "black bodies" (Burke's "vacant spaces dispersed among the objects we view") is always, simultaneously, a mark of bondage to the ideology of the aesthetic. There is something melancholy in the passion for and containment of the terrifyingly foreign, something which perhaps indicates the drunken desire of a voracious, and passing, subjectivity. In one of many séances, the Voice of Death speaks to Victor Hugo, telling him what to demand in terms familiar to the aesthetic of sublimity which Hugo hoped to revise as a specifically "oriental" sublime. Death's voice, spoken within the image of a "face purple with suns," is haunting in the context of the aesthetic treatises I have discussed precisely because its imagery suggests the way in which the sublime vision turns into darkness, and clothes itself in the "sad and fuscous colours, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like" (*E*, pp. 81–82) of obscurity. "Me ..." said Death, "in your place ... I would demand everything or nothing; I would demand immensity; I would summon infinity ... I would make my brain swallow God ... . I would dine on the night ... I would develop a magnificent hunger, an enormous thirst ... I would run through space drunk with celestial spheres and singing formidable drinking songs of joyous eternity, radiant, sublime, hands full of clusters of stars ... and face purple with suns."[69] Aesthetic discourse is deeply implicated in the production of stereotypes of race and gender; to the extent that sublime vision "dines on the night," it also harbors the magnificent hunger for foreign bodies whose imagined excess can only be grasped in the false knowledge of stereotypical abjection. "Turning in upon itself," the sublime vision offers a face "purple with suns," a specter Uncle James might recognize as a prefiguration of the destruction not only of the foreign but of the fearful and counterfeit innocence of the subject of aesthetic ideology.[70]

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1. bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 338–346; 341.

2. Terry Eagleton *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), p. 75.

3. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 147.

4. The force of aesthetic discourse for contemporary theories of cultural difference is engaged by Michael Taussig's critical use of several forms of the Burkean, Conradian, and postmodern sublime to inform his experimental ethnography. See Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

5. I am writing here of European aesthetics and by "forms of difference" I mean, primarily, foreign bodies: those whose flesh, features, and practices were imagined as radically other than those of Europeans. While it may be that images of such bodies (or the bodies themselves, as in displays of exotics) were sometimes experienced as "abject," I think that "forms of difference" is more appropriate because large amounts of energy were expended in the distinctions among foreign bodies and practices, in part to measure (and to create) their distance from a presumed European standard or model. While I may write of the "abject" in other passages of this essay, I resist the assumption that it adequately conveys *all* forms of the exotic; foreign bodies, while often imagined as sublime, were marked this way for a variety of conflicting reasons and I do not wish to suggest or assume homogeneity in these images.

6. In other media, images of an exotic sublime would only grow in importance and complexity in the nineteenth century. I am thinking of the work of romantic orientalist painters such as Jean-Leon Gerome and Eugène Delacroix, or Victor Hugo's redefinition of the sublime as grotesque, precisely to the extent that the grotesque was also exoticized. See Hugo's "Preface to Cromwell" in Charles W. Eliot, ed., *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1910), vol. 39, pp. 354–408.

7. The imagination of difference in romantic and orientalist discourse contributes to—is perhaps embedded within—existing aesthetic frameworks. The articulation of the "exotic," whether in terms of nation, culture, or gender, is

accomplished in part through a reimagination of the categories of beauty and sublimity.

8. For sustained discussions of the relationship between theories of ideology and aesthetic discourse, particularly with regard to deconstructive and Marxist theory, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), and Forest Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford University Press, 1995). My use of the term "ideology" in this essay is intended to cohere with Pyle's sense of the "intrication of the imagination and ideology" such that ideology must be thought as "the fundamental necessity of a representation of the social" and imagination then as ideological to the extent that "in its tasks of articulation, it addresses the fissures of the social and governs the attempted representation of their coherence" (p. 3). The "co-implication" of imagination and ideology, Pyle argues, requires that romantic texts be read "as documents that speculate in theme and by performance upon the operations of ideology ... speculation extends beyond the historically specific 'ideology' of the age to the ideological operations thorough which our relations to language and society continue to be formed. ... A reading of romantic texts reveals the mechanisms by which those texts present and occult their relationship to language, subjectivity, society—in short, their ideological condition" (p. 4). Part of the task of my essay is to read the imagination of foreign bodies and terrors in the aesthetic treatises of Burke and Kant as just such an ideological process of presenting and obscuring the thematic and performative aspects of stereotypes of race and gender *as they inform* the discursive relationships between "language, subjectivity, society" in these texts and the material (bodies) from which their images arise.

9. For a detailed history of use of the natural world, particularly mountains, in negative conceptions of the sublime, see Marjorie Hope Nicholson's *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963). See also D. G. Charlton, *New Images of the Natural in France: A Study in European Cultural History 1750–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chap. 3, "Wild Sublimity"; U. C. Knoepflmacher and G. B. Tennyson, *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (University of California Press, 1977), chaps. 5–7. Not surprisingly, given the emphasis on vision and the natural world in the rhetoric of sublimity, the literary sublime is often treated in conjunction with (even incomprehensible without) studies of the sublime in painting. See for example, Matthew Cannon Breennan, *Wordsworth, Turner, and Romantic Landscape: A Study of the Traditions of the Picturesque and the Sublime* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1987); Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime* (University of Chicago Press, 1980); Barbara C. Matilsky, *Sublime Landscape Painting in Nineteenth-Century France: Alpine and Arctic Iconography and their Relationship to Natural History* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1983). For a somewhat parodic reading of psychoanalytic implications of the sublime in landscape painting, see Bryan Jay Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

10. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). This text will be cited by the abbreviation *E* followed by a page number, in parenthesis.

11. In S. H. Monk's assessment, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), this emphasis on the subjective also makes it possible for theories of the sublime such as Burke's to be interpreted as contesting neoclassical views. Walter J. Hipple, Jr., adds a qualification: "This program [Burke's] is not, as some moderns have seen it, a step from the objectivism of the neoclassic to a psychological and subjective view; ... all the aestheticians from Addison to Kant and onwards conceived of the sublime as a feeling in the mind caused by certain properties in external objects" (*The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque* [Southern Illinois University Press, 1958], p. 84). Of course, Hipple's opinion of Burke and Kant is established without consideration of the particular bodies both use to establish the sublimity of racial and gendered differences.

12. Burke's *Enquiry* can be read as a performance of the kinds of feelings and distinctions which he deems part of any correct view of beauty or the sublime. In this sense, then, Burke's invocation of the black female as an example of the natural "effects of blackness" instantiates the act of distinction as in part also a willful blindness to its replication of other adjacent discursive practices, in this case terror inspired by race or gender. The *Enquiry* is a performance of aesthetic experience in many ways similar to that Judith Butler describes for identification with heterosexuality, in part because heterosexual practices provide the metaphorical basis of comparisons between the feminine and masculine in Burke's text. This is perhaps most striking to the extent that Burke is "educating" a suspiciously masculine passion/eye. (The heterosexual nature of the remarks on passion, as well as the address to the masculine subject, seems obvious in passages such as this: "We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; whilst the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire" [*E,* p. 91].) In reformulating her initial Foucauldian thesis to stress the *performativity* of gender, Butler calls for "a rethinking of the process by which a bodily norm is assumed ... not, strictly speaking, undergone *by a subject,* but rather that the subject ... is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process of assuming a sex" and says as well that "this process of 'assuming' a sex" must be linked "with the question of identification, and with the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications." Butler refers to the enabling of certain identifications and the foreclosure of others as an "exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed" which requires the production of the *abject,* a term which holds some kinship with the sublime. Subject formation "requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone ... will constitute the site of dreaded identification against which ... the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life. In this sense,

then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (*Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York: Routledge, 1993], p. 3). See also Butler's further discussion of the psychoanalytic importance of the abject in note 2, p. 243. Butler's "abject" differs significantly from Julia Kristeva's in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), particularly because Butler is interested in questioning Kristeva's association of the feminine/maternal with that which is "outside" or at the boundaries of the human. See the analysis of Kristeva and Irigaray on this point in *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 36–49. Butler regards the status of abjection as a "threatening spectre" as part of the regulatory practice through which identification with domains of abjection is disavowed. But, she claims, "this disavowed abjection will threaten to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control" (p. 3). Burke's use of the black female as an illustration inadvertantly threatens the premise that the "effects of blackness" are "natural," not cultivated through association. At the same time, this illustration disrupts Burke's argument and suspends its legitimacy.

13. Burke elaborates: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, is a source of the *sublime;* that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure" (*E*, p. 39).

14. Admittedly, what I am calling "cultural" would be somewhat foreign to Burke, who uses here the terms "custom" and "habit" interchangeably to indicate those objects and experiences to which we have become accustomed. "Custom" and "habit" are the subject of extended criticism in the *Enquiry* precisely because Burke wishes to locate beauty and the sublime as out of the ordinary, possessed of a novelty which is not merely curiosity but able to elicit higher passions (apparently of society and love). "Novelty" may be read as the site of Burke's ideological move to say both that beauty and sublimity are natural, beyond the contingencies of the merely cultural, and that aesthetic experiences of them are customary within the subject's identification with the roles dictated by what he calls "sex." See part III in which Burke's criticism centers upon the received wisdom that proportion, fitness, and perfection are causes of beauty. In the following parenthetical remark from sec. V, Burke makes clear that beauty has nothing whatsoever to do with received ideas or customs: "Indeed beauty is so far from belonging to the idea of custom, that in reality what affects us in that manner is extremely rare and uncommon. ... the general idea of beauty, can be no more owing to customary than to natural proportion" (*E*, p. 103). Such attacks on custom do not, of course, prevent Burke from invoking several "customary" associations between feminine beauty and weakness or imperfection in his argument that perfection is not the cause of beauty. In this, statements which might be read by the contemporary reader as suggesting the performative nature of the beautiful are attributed by Burke to some natural will toward self-preservation: "so far is perfection ... from being the cause of beauty; that this quality, where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this, for which reason, they learn to lisp [they learn to perform beautifully], to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness. In all this, they are guided by nature. Beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty. Blushing has little less power; and modesty in general, which is a tacit allowance of imperfection, is itself considered an amiable quality, and certainly heightens every other that is so" (*E*, p. 110). Women are naturally urged toward the performance of beautiful weaknesses in order to gain love, in contrast to the admiration more appropriate to the terror of sublime powers of men (see part III, sec. X). Indeed, in later sections, it appears that Burke is moving from a consideration of what things/bodies inspire the passions of love (of a man for a woman) to a definition of the beautiful; in this he does not feel he is tracing the cultural definitions of the feminine. This is remarkable to the extent that Burke often turns toward classical texts and academic hearsay in order to learn what has been considered beautiful—e.g., "And what degree of extent prevails in bodies, that are held beautiful, may be gathered from the usual manner of expression concerning it. I am told that in most languages ..." (*E*, p. 113).

15. Other components of beauty are: smallness, smoothness, delicacy, and light complexion; of these Burke says: "These are, I believe, the properties on which beauty depends; properties that operate by nature, and are less liable to be altered by caprice, or confounded by a diversity of tastes, than any others" (*E*, p. 117).

16. See part I, sec. X, in which Burke uses this distinction to separate "Men" from brutes: "The passion which belongs to generation, merely as such, is lust only; this is evident in brutes. ... The only distinction they observe with regard to their mates is that of sex." Man, on the other hand, has a more complicated and "mixed passion" which admits of *social* qualities "which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with other animals ... The object therefore of this mixed passion which we call love, is the *beauty* of the *sex*. Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal *beauty*" (*E*, p. 42).

17. Early in part I, Burke uses "giddiness" to describe the effect of novelty, linking it to ephemeral pleasures: "But as those things which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time, curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections; it changes its object perpetually; it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied; and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness and anxiety" (*E*, p. 31). Burke concedes that some novelty is necessary to "every instrument which works upon the mind" but he is more concerned with "other [more abiding] powers besides novelty" (*E*, p. 31); his discussion of pain and pleasure in the ensuing sections addresses these other means of moving the passions.

18. See, for instance, part IV, sec. V–X111, which speculate about the importance of the physiological effects of light rays on the eye, and the possibility that it is the quantity and intensity of vibration of light rays bouncing off sublime objects which produce the pain associated with it. Of course, if as Burke says, "Black bodies, reflecting none, or but a few rays, with regard to sight are but so many vacant

spaces dispersed among the objects we view," (*E*, p. 147), it is hard to see how such physiological effects produce the sublime "effect of blackness" in the boy's vision of the black female offered in the Cheselden example. Burke explains, however, that in this case it is the shock the eye feels upon suddenly relaxing in such blackness which causes it to suffer "a convulsive spring" (*E*, p. 147).

19. "There is a chain in all our sensations; they are all but different sorts of feelings, calculated to be affected by various sorts of objects, but all to be affected after the same manner" (*E*, p. 120).

20. In this regard, poetry is judged superior to painting, which indicates that the kind of "vision" Burke is really talking about here relies upon an "eye" which *creates as it reacts*, or which produces vision and is not exclusively dependent upon the physiological reactions of light rays, a subject which preoccupies Burke in other sections. Although Burke does not dwell at any length upon the imagination, it seems that this is the source of the truly violent and tempestuous passions which accompany the sublime, or which provoke that thing called "love" which is able to transcend the "purely physical" compulsions of desire. On the superiority of poetry in the production of the sublime, he writes: "I know several [excellent judges] who admire and love painting, and yet who regard the objects of their admiration in that art, with coolness enough, in comparison of that warmth with which they are animated by affecting pieces of poetry or rhetoric. Among the common sort of people, I never could perceive that painting had much influence on their passions. It is true that the best sorts of painting, as well as the best sorts of poetry, are not much understood in that sphere. But it is most certain, that their passions are very strongly roused by a fanatic preacher, or by the ballads of Chevy-chase, or the children in the wood, ... I do not know of any paintings, bad or good, that produce the same effect. *So that poetry with all its obscurity, has a more general as well as a more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art*" (*E*, p. 61; my emphasis).

21. Burke's treatment of the eye has obvious relevance to the critique of ocularcentrism in deconstructive theory. While the complicated history of this critique is beyond the immediate province of this essay, the fact that it may be an important way to read the *gender* of Burke's sublime vision bears mention. For a bibliography as well as a discussion of this critique and the relationship between feminist criticism and Derrida's notion of ocularcentrism, see Martin Jay, "'Phallogocularcentrism': Derrida and Irigaray," in *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 493–542.

22. This lack of intelligibility in terror is what Michael Taussig calls "epistemic and ontological murk" Trying to "make sense" of colonial stories about the terror of "savages" in the Putumayo, Taussig says: "It seems to me that stories like these were indispensable to the formation and flowering of the colonial imagination during the Putumayo rubber boom. ... Far from being trivial daydreams indulged in after work was over, these stories and the imagination they sustained were a potent political force without which the work of conquest and of supervising rubber gathering could not have been accomplished. ... The importance of this colonial work of fabulation ... lies in the way it creates an uncertain reality out of fiction, giving shape and voice to the formless form of the reality in which an unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a phantasmic social force. All societies live by fictions taken as real. What distinguishes cultures of terror is that the epistemological, ontological, and otherwise philosophical problem of representation—reality and illusion, certainty and doubt—becomes infinitely more than a 'merely' philosophical problem of epistemology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction. It becomes a high-powered medium of domination, and during the Putumayo rubber boom this medium of epistemic and ontological murk was most keenly figured and thrust into consciousness as the space of death" (*Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* [University of Chicago Press, 1987], p. 121). Taussig describes the vertigo he felt during his archival research on the Putumayo with reference to Burke's sublime in *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

23. A few pages later, Burke gives a more detailed description of the cognitive dissonance which he attributes to the sublime: "The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness, and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness. The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind ... But painting, when we have allowed for the pleasure of imitation, can only affect simply by the images it presents; and even in painting a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to the effects of the picture; because the images in painting are exactly similar to those in nature; and in nature dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those have which are more clear and determinate" (*E*, p. 62).

24. "It gives me pleasure to see nature in these great though terrible scenes. It fills the mind with grand ideas, and turns the soul in upon itself" (from Burke's *Early Life*, cited in Monk, *The Sublime*, p. 87).

25. Burke here says the sublime produces a strong "emotion" but in other passages, as I mention in note 17, he speculates on the physiological reactions of the eye whose pain may then be interpreted by the mind *as* an emotional response to a sublime object. In sec. IV, Burke discusses the "curious story" of a Dominican physiognomist, Tomasso Campanella (1568–1639), who reported that he could penetrate the minds of others simply by mimicking their facial gestures and observing what state of mind this mimicry provoked in him. Burke supports Campanella's conclusions because, he says, "I have often observed, that on mimicking the looks and gestures, of angry, or placid, or frighted, or daring men, I have involuntarily found my mind turned to that passion whose appearance I endeavoured to imitate; nay, I am convinced it is hard to avoid it; though one strove to separate the passion from its correspondent gestures" (*E*, p. 133). While this highly remarkable passage may suggest to some the performative aspects of Burke's identifications with angry, placid, frightened or daring men, it is here meant to strengthen Burke's argument that the mind and body are so intimately connected that no account of aesthetic experience may ignore the reciprocity between emotion and physiology *and* such an account must find the *laws* which regulate the play between the two. Such laws will show that the finer feelings associated with the beautiful and the sublime are not produced by chance but are, in fact, the result of a fine correspondence between the body and mind which has been

created by providence. Experiences which are not "fine" but the result of base desires and lust will produce no such correspondence. It may be significant that Burke notes Campanella's superb abilities to "abstract his attention from any sufferings of the body" and thereby to feel no pain when he was tortured for certain alleged political activities. Far from suggesting the possibility that some subjects may be alienated from their bodies, or from the finer feelings of pleasure, pain and delight in aesthetic experience, and may therefore be only relatively capable or incapable of submitting to the "natural" laws of self-preservation and the society of the sexes, this example is pursued only to the extent that it also suggests the intimate connection between mind and body. Given that Campanella's abilities are practiced in response to the repressive measures of the state, it would seem likely that one could argue, by extension, that aesthetic experience is also a reaction to the repressive and regulatory practices of the state or society. At least, this would seem to be indirectly implied in Burke's account, although impossible for him to state given his need to argue for the "naturalness" of the aesthetic.

26. Monk, *The Sublime,* pp. 39–40.

27. "[S]uch a light as that of the sun, immediately exerted on the eye, as it overpowers the sense, is a very great idea. Light of an inferior strength to this, if it moves with great celerity, has the same power; for lightning is certainly productive of grandeur, which it owes chiefly to the extreme velocity of its motion. A quick transition is more productive of sublime ideas than light. ... Extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness" (*E,* p. 80).

28. Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (Columbia University Press, 1985).

29. Burke is quoting from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding.*

30. Burke's concession to Locke is to say that if darkness is terrifying by association, it must be "an association of a more general nature, an association which takes in all mankind" (*E,* p. 143). In the subsequent section, however, Burke does try to prove "that blackness and darkness are in some degree painful by their natural operation," and here again Burke is interested in the physiological effects of viewing darkness.

31. In the earlier discussion of "Obscurity" (part II, sec. III), however, Burke invokes common or received notions of darkness to substantiate his claim that obscure and dark things are sublime. Although *Paradise Lost* is reserved as the strongest example of the sublime effects of "judicious obscurity," most of Burke's other examples are from governments or cultures other than his own, for example: "Those despotic governments, which are founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear, keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye. The policy has been the same in many cases of religion. Almost all the heathen temples were dark. Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship" (*E,* p. 59).

32. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 131.

33. It is possible that the black female coalesces anxieties of gender and race in a more general fashion, as well. In *The Romantic Agony,* trans. Angus Davidson (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968 [1933]), Mario Praz argues that the idea of pleasure in terror, like that of the association between the horrid and the beautiful, was fairly well established by the end of the eighteenth century. The construction of the female body as "beautifully horrid" required that this body be conceived as a material upon which men could project cruel desires, imagined as the decay and dismemberment of her body. Praz contrasts seventeenth-century writers with the romantics, using the example of the negress (along with the hunchback, mad woman, and woman already interred) as one of the usual "grotesques and whimseys" of Adimari's writings. With later writers such whimseys become integral to romantic aesthetics: "with the Romantics the same themes fitted naturally into the general taste of the period, which tended towards the uncontrolled, the macabre, the terrible, the strange" (p. 938). Thus, the fact that Burke associates the black female with the terror of the sublime is, in this light, becoming almost conventional and would, as Praz argues, form part of the romantic "ethos." Praz is problematic, of course, because he writes of these aesthetic changes as if they are merely problems internal to the history of literary and poetic invention, rather than reflective or generative of views of the feminine embedded within specific cultural, historical, and political conflicts.

34. Joshua Reynolds, "The True Idea of Beauty" (10 November 1759), in *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds,* ed. Henry William Beechey, new and improved ed. (London, 1852), vol. II, p. 34, cited in Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art,* vol. IV, part 2 (Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 10.

35. See Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," in *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204–242.

36. On the bearded lady, see Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,* trans. John T. Goldthwait (University of California Press, 1960), p. 54. This text will henceforth be cited by the abbreviation *O* followed by a page number, in parenthesis.

37. The treatise begins, "The various feelings of enjoyment or of displeasure rest not so much upon the nature of the external things that arouse them as upon each person's own disposition to be moved by these to pleasure or pain" (*O,* p. 45).

38. The entire passage is: "Gradually, as the claims upon charms diminish, the reading of books and the broadening of insight could refill unnoticed the vacant place of the Graces with the Muses, and the husband should be the first instructor" (*O,* p. 92).

39. Kant offers a similar qualification in a later note, this time suggesting that one can always claim to be an exception to the stereotypical tastes of national character: "In each folk the finest part contains praiseworthy characters of all kinds, and whoever is affected by one or another reproach will, if he is fine enough, understand the advantage that follows when he relinquishes all the others to their fate but makes an exception of himself" (*O,* p. 100). In these notes, Kant avoids some of the silliness of such classifications and their notable exceptions which was apparent in David Hume's opening remarks to his own earlier essay "Of National characters": "We have reason to expect greater wit and gaiety in a FRENCHMAN than in a SPANIARD; tho' CERVANTES was born in SPAIN. An ENGLISHMAN will naturally be supposed to have more knowledge than a

DANE; tho' TYCHO BRAHE was a native of DENMARK" ("Of National Character," *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects,* vol. 1 [London: A. Millar, 1764], pp. 223–241, p. 223). Such exceptions, however, can also exempt entire nations from character in general, as in Hume's remark that because of the "great liberty and independency" enjoyed by every Englishman, "the ENGLISH, of any people in the universe, have the least of a national character; unless this very singularity may stand for such" (p. 233).

40. For discussions of the growth of an idea of race, see Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Writing, 'Race' and the Difference it Makes," *"Race," Writing, and Difference, Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 1–20; Michael P. Banton, *The Idea of Race* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); and Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

41. In his essay "Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," Henry Louis Gates Jr., briefly compares Hume and Kant on racial difference, but does not discuss the importance of this for aesthetic theory in general or for the sublime in particular. Having other purposes for his essay, Gates focuses on Kant's conflation of "color with intelligence" (p. 10) in order to establish the depth of racism in "major European philosophers," and by implication in European arts and letters generally. Gates admonishes those he addresses as "Third World critics" to "analyze the language of contemporary criticism itself, recognizing especially that hermeneutic systems are not universal, color-blind, apolitical or neutral" (p. 15). Gates argues that "[t]o attempt to appropriate our own discourses by using Western critical theory uncritically is to substitute one mode of neocolonialism for another" (p. 15).

42. *O,* p. 121, n. 1. In this note, the translator cites J. H. W. Stuckenberg, *The Life of Immanuel Kant* (London, 1882), pp. 2–4.

43. See the translator's notes, *O,* p. 123, n. 5 and 6.

44. Here, Kant defers to Hume's racist challenge that one could not find "a single example in which a Negro had shown talents" and that "not a single one [negro] was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality" (*O,* p. 111).

45. Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell," pp. 354–408.

46. "The Indians have a dominating taste for the grotesque, of the sort that falls into the adventurous. Their religion consists of grotesqueries. Idols of monstrous form, the priceless tooth of the mighty monkey Hanuman, the unnatural atonements of the fakirs (heathen mendicant friars) and so forth are his taste. ... What trifling grotesqueries do the verbose and studied compliments of the Chinese contain! Even their paintings are grotesque and portray strange and unnatural figures such as are encountered nowhere in the world" (*O,* p. 110).

47. See Meg Armstrong, "'A Jumble of Foreignness': The Sublime Musayums of Nineteenth-Century Fairs and Expositions," *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1993).

48. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View,* trans. Mary J. Gregor (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1974).

49. Ibid., p. 178.

50. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 77–81. Lyotard contrasts the modern and the postmodern sublime on the basis of the latter's emphasis on the unpresentable: "modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure. Yet these sentiments do not constitute the real sublime sentiment, which is an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain: the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept.

"The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms ... that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (p. 81).

51. See Fredric Jameson's remarks on the "hysterical sublime" in "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92; Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2 (Spring 1990): 1–24; and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 1–17.

52. See also *O,* pp. 48–49 on the sublimity of pyramids and deserts.

53. "[T]his idea of the supersensible ... is awakened in us by an object the aesthetic estimating of which strains the imagination to its utmost, whether in respect of its extension (mathematical), or of its might over the mind (dynamical)" (Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* trans. James Creed Meredith [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], §29 p. 120).

54. Hertz, *The End of the Line,* p. 40.

55. Kant continues, "[b]ut this idea of the supersensible, which no doubt we cannot further determine—so that we cannot cognize nature as its presentation, but only *think* it as such—is awakened in us by an object the aesthetic estimating of which strains the imagination to its utmost, whether in respect of its extension (mathematical), or of its might over the mind (dynamical). For it is founded upon the feeling of a sphere of the mind which altogether exceeds the realm of nature (i.e., upon the moral feeling), with regard to which the representation of the object is estimated as subjectively final" (*Critique of Judgement,* §29, p. 120).

56. Ibid., §29, p. 121.

57. Pyle, *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 7.

58. Fanon emphasizes a phenomenological idea of the bodily schema as "[a] slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world," or "a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world" (*Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann [New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967], p. 111).

59. Ibid., p. 112.

60. Ibid., p. 112.

61. Ibid., p. 113; my emphasis.

62. "[S]ad and fuscous colours, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like" (Burke, *E,* pp. 81–82).

63. hooks's description is similar as well, in some ways, to Melville's description of the whiteness of Moby Dick (*Moby Dick,* eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker [New York: W. W. Norton, 1967], chap. 42).

64. bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 341. hooks's essay, oddly enough, has an eighteenth-century precursor in a work written by Joseph Spence (Sir Harry Beaumont), *Crito: Or a Dialogue on Beauty* (1752). Spence favored aesthetic relativism by evoking "the story of a black woman's fright upon seeing white men," a view challenged by Edmund Burke in his *Enquiry*. For a brief discussion, see Andreas Mielke, "Hottentots in the Aesthetic Discussion of Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Monatshefte* 80 (1988): 135–148; p. 135. Mielke's short essay deals with the use of Hottentots in eighteenth-century aesthetics, and criticizes the work of Sander Gilman; on the whole, Mielke is an unconvincing apologist for racist writing in German aesthetic theory.

65. "It is hard to resist the thought that the 'great horror' at the black woman (in contrast to the mere 'uneasiness' at a black object) is as much owing to the clash of aesthetic and political sensibilities as it is to the mechanics of vision," *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 131.

66. James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On the Mountain, Giovanni's Room, The Fire Next Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1988 [1962]), pp. 19–20.

67. Ibid., p. 23.

68. Ibid.

69. Gustave Simon, ed., *Chez Victor Hugo: Les Tables tournantes de Jersey* (Paris: L. Conard, 1923), cited in and trans. by Suzanne Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime: Hugo, Baudelaire, Lautréamont* (Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 65.

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