Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and Worldly Realism

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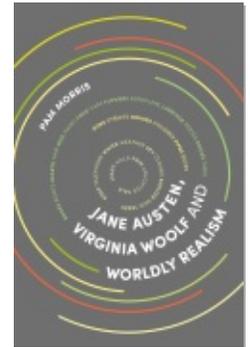Published by Edinburgh University Press

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Part I

Systems and Things

Sense and Sensibility: Wishing is Believing

Sense and Sensibility (1st drafts c.1795–7; pub. 1811) opens with a wrenching moment of change and loss as the Dashwood women are forced to leave their home. Yet the pressures and insecurities of lives caught up in processes of change seem barely to figure in popular screen adaptations of Austen's novels which serve largely to perpetuate an idealist consensus. Visually beautiful and nostalgic in tone, these versions of her stories offer viewers entry into a charmingly organic English world of pretty young women, safely comic idiosyncrasy, wealthy young men and country estates. This is a popularised idealism of eternal verities, benign hierarchy, predictable plots, all untouched by historical forces and seeming to have existed always in a sunny clarity of the imagination. Such depictions represent what Raymond Williams has criticised as 'idealised abstractions' of Austen's novels.[1] Yet this bland popularism belies the critical seriousness with which Austen's writing was received by some, at least, of her first readers. Walter Scott, for example, immediately recognises that Austen is doing something new in fiction. Not only is she dealing with characters and feelings taken from ordinary life as opposed to the nobility, it is the innovative quality and detail of this ordinariness in her writing that is interesting and illuminating for Scott.[2] What Scott appears to grasp here is that Austen is shifting the field of the perceptible, to use Jacques Rancière's term, making visible and audible a familiarity which was nevertheless previously below the horizon of notice, deemed inappropriate to the dignity of representation. Rancière locates this shift of representational regime at around the end of the eighteenth century.[3]

The potential insights contained in Scott's assessment of Austen had dissipated by the mid-nineteenth century. George Henry Lewes

condescendingly concurred with those like Bishop Whately who, in 1822, praised the Shakespearean realism of Austen's dramatic dialogues;[4] for Lewes, however, the smallness of scale and limited social range of her work denied it serious artistic stature.[5] This view of an unhistorical, unchallenging Austen was reinforced by her family's posthumous emphasis upon her retiring, lady-like demeanour.[6] Although she remained steadily popular through into the twentieth century, there was no early critical reappraisal of the importance and scale of her work. Only Virginia Woolf, in her essays, consistently asserts a far more appreciative view. For Woolf, Austen is a highly significant writer, undoubtedly the more so for being a woman. She figures among those writers that Woolf regards as achieving the highest levels of novelistic art. She belongs with Defoe, Dickens, Hardy and Conrad, writers certainly not thought of as limited in scale or ambition. Woolf largely ignores Austen's story matter, recognising her rigorous artistic impersonality and capacity to light upon that detail which 'expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes that are outwardly trivial'.[7]

In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt sought to position Austen at a pivotal moment in literary, cultural and social history. Watt claims Austen is heir to eighteenth-century philosophical and social developments and, as such, must be recognised as the initiator of a modern tradition of realism. Austen combines Richardson's psychological focus upon individual subjectivity with Fielding's social objectivity, Watt asserted.[8] Despite this recognition of Austen's heritage in eighteenth-century empiricism, the predominantly idealist understanding of Austen's art remained; as a supreme ironist she was concerned to express a classic moral, rather than a historical, vision. In 1963, Watt summed up the consensual view of her art in ahistorical, universalist terms: 'the current view of Jane Austen is that she is first and foremost a critical observer of humanity'. Her novels, he concluded, are now seen as 'a microcosm of some larger moral universe'.[9] It was not until Marilyn Butler's groundbreaking *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, published in 1974, that Austen's fiction was fully considered within a historical perspective. Butler's scholarly account of the polarisation of British politics in the era of the French Revolution and her readings of Austen's novels as partisan products of these polemics broke completely with earlier reverential accounts of the fictions as timeless masterpieces. While opening up Austen studies to invigorating historical research, Butler nevertheless imposed a new orthodox view of Austen as morally,

socially and politically conservative.[10] Butler banished the moral idealist and superb ironist, but she banished, too, Austen as heir to the Enlightenment. Butler's Austen is unattractively pious and illiberal.

From the 1970s, feminist critics began to engage with Austen's texts from a historical perspective, that of the woman writer in the early nineteenth century, but none directly challenged Butler's thesis. Important early feminist studies, like those of Gilbert and Gubar and Mary Poovey tended to interpret her as a female artist hemmed in by repressive patriarchal structures and ideologies.[11] Such a perspective inevitably slants the readings towards negative discoveries of what Austen cannot do or to ways in which she is complicit with masculine hegemony. It also tends to preclude awareness of other social and cultural forces beyond those of gender. Even Claudia L. Johnson's undoubtedly radical readings in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988) and *Equivocal Beings* (1995) avoid direct confrontation with *The War of Ideas*. Although Johnson situates Austen within a discussion of the influence of Locke's liberalism upon end-of-century women writers, the focus is still upon her representation of marriage and family rather than any wider national forces and structures.[12] As such, Austen's realism has only a slightly wider scale of reference from that allowed her by early critics like George Henry Lewes.

Recently, Butler's argument in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* has been more seriously challenged. Edward Neill, for example, in *The Politics of Jane Austen*, is undoubtedly right when he points to 'a certain theoretical naivety' in the way Butler presents her case, and the lack of all consideration of language, techniques of representation and subjectivity in Butler's readings of the novels.[13] In *The Historical Austen*, William H. Galperin also convincingly overturns the Butler view of Austen as wholly conservative and supportive of regulatory structures.[14] However, these studies by Neill and Galperin, and others like them, are informed by New Historicism and poststructuralist critical perspectives. Thus they look for progressive elements within Austen's novels only in terms of the uncanny or of a resistant otherness. Their theoretical positions disallow any recuperation of a more radical Austen by linking her in positive ways to either the Enlightenment or to realism. Indeed, in addition to refuting Butler, their stated aim is to deny Ian Watt's recognition of Austen as originator of the modern tradition of realism. According to Galperin, Austen's 'historical role as realism's most important progenitor has been grossly exaggerated' (*Historical Austen*, p. 6).

Only Peter Knox-Shaw, in *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, attempts to answer Butler in her own historicist terms. He refutes the accusations of religious conformity and conservative politics, demonstrating instead Austen's many allegiances to Enlightenment thinking and 'more particularly [to] that sceptical tradition within it that flourished in England and Scotland during the second half of the eighteenth century'.[15] Knox-Shaw's scholarly and detailed account of the whole Austen family's pervasive cultural engagement with many aspects of Enlightenment thinking provides an authoritative counterbalance to Butler's over-polarised interpretation of post-revolutionary England. The limitation of his study lies in its concern entirely with ideas and cultural context. Readings of individual novels provide few insights into how the techniques and form of the fictions are shaped by Austen's immersion in Enlightenment views of self, social reality and structures of knowledge. Without this dual perspective of Austen's formal innovations and the determining social vision that requires them, it is impossible fully to appreciate either her experimental realism or her political progressivism.

In fact, the narrative form of all three novels that I shall discuss here, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, articulates a contested process of emergence as an old order begins to yield to new possibilities of an order not yet fully resolved. It is thus a moment of dissensus in which contesting regimes of representation, both artistic and political, strive for dominance. The writing practice Austen forges from this transitional context articulates a worldly realist aesthetic and perspective, emphasising the horizontal continuity of self with social and bio-physical worlds. In each of these three novels, the central character or characters track a movement from a stable, hierarchical order of life out into a world of horizontal social plurality. Moreover, the primary concern of the fiction increases in scope from novel to novel; widening from contested representations of self to those of nation and finally to the commonality of all creaturely life. In each story, the central protagonist, who mediates the energies of social change and shifting values, is a woman. It is through her young women that Austen looks to the possibilities of a more progressive social order. This movement enacted by the plot structure of these three novels can also be understood, in Michel de Certeau's terms, as a shift from place as metaphor, symbolising time-denying values, to space as metonymic process and flow.[16] Equally, it can be seen as a shift of representational regime from what Jacques Rancière denotes as the vertical classical order of the perceptible to a new horizontal

democratic distribution of the seen and heard, of people and things, of self and other (*Politics and Literature*, p. 10).

A representational struggle over what constitutes the self is always at issue in any emergence of a new social order. Roy Porter remarks that there was no single Enlightenment view of what constituted human nature 'but rather difference, debate and dialogue'.[17] Austen's novels enter into these debates by dramatising conflicting representational regimes of self. Hence the prevailing impression, in her fiction, that characters are in some sort performing their identity, their idea of self. The predominant view from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment tradition of David Hume, Adam Smith and David Hartley is of the self as a factitious, embodied, social being; an identity produced as physical sensation is wrought upon by social sympathies and mutual interests. This eighteenth-century notion of embodied sociability has roots in an earlier tradition in which the shared needs of physical existence – shelter, warmth and food – provided the common basis of celebrations, rituals and festivals like Christmas, harvest, weddings and so on, that punctuated the yearly calendar.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the ideal of sociability was challenged by two emergent forms of individualism, both of which situated the self within a newly conceptualised private realm. One version of the individualistic private self is produced by identification with competitive possession. Wealth, land and consumer goods all function to magnify the imagined idea of self, to utilise Elizabeth Hamilton's term,[18] by the ceaseless expansion of material ownership, of the realm of what is mine as opposed to yours. Subjective individualism, on the other hand, augments the idea of self by imposing its own abstract system of values, its mental universe, upon the external world. In giving dramatic form to these two factitious versions of self, Austen seems to recognise, like Hamilton, the powerful embodied energies that relentlessly impel such self-projections. For Austen, both self-interest and subjective idealism are driven not so much by rationality as by the self's desires and insecurities.

Austen's worldly realism is evident in her recognition of the interactive dynamics between self and things. In Austen's novels material objects are inseparable from the emergence of new social formations and from the self's ability to objectify its own imagined identity. This horizontal interdependency between social structures, self-consciousness and things is most apparent in the realm of taste, in which objects of consumption constitute emerging and residual

representational regimes. On the one hand, conspicuous consumption denotes, materially and competitively, the extent and substance of wealth and hence the importance, power and amplitude of self. On the other hand, and equally competitively, things act as signifiers of inner sensibility. In this regime, the substance and materiality of things is disavowed as they become symbols of abstract values. This paradoxical, idealist conversion of the objective world into the subjective is directly opposed to eighteenth-century empiricism in which material things are taken as evidence of the order of the physical world.

There is an earlier still representational tradition in which things function both materially and symbolically to refer to the necessities of creaturely life: they are, in this sense, literally objects of consumption. Food and fires, for example, contain rich residual connotations of older communal life and values. In all of these ways, things, in Austen's texts, traverse various, often antagonistic, networks of residual, dominant and emergent discourses, institutions and practices. Things, for Austen, as for Bruno Latour, function as gatherings.[19]

Despite the binarism of its title, the opening of *Sense and Sensibility* plays upon a different opposition: the constitution and visibility of a shared world versus the restrictions and possessiveness of the private realm. The first two paragraphs trace an alternation between expansion and contraction of the social identity and sympathies of the Dashwood family. Having previously lived expansively on the family estate of Norland in 'the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance', the late owner retrenched to a less outgoing social style with only his sister as companion and housekeeper. Her death, however, brought into his life 'the society of his nephew and niece, and their children'.[20] 'Society' is a much used term in the text. Marvin B. Becker has noted how the meaning of the word shifts during the course of the eighteenth century. It is a shift that denotes the loss of value of the social and public realm to the private. Whereas the older designation had been that of fellowship, it increasingly came to denote 'an entity both distant and abstract'.[21] Austen uses the term 'society' here in this first chapter and elsewhere in the older sense of 'fellowship' underlining this by emphasising the comfort of social sympathies the elder Mr Dashwood gains from the goodness of heart of his nephew and wife and the relish added to his life by the cheerfulness of the children. Yet, despite this experience of expanded social being, his death seals a contraction of identity around a strictly bounded notion of possessive self. He secures the

whole of his estate to the nominal male line, a child of four years old. As a result, the Dashwood women are propelled out from the settled security of place into an interactive space of unpredictable social processes and events.

'A world without property was almost inconceivable to eighteenth-century Englishmen', according to Paul Langford.[22] In a very real sense, property, for the upper classes, was self. Certainly, for a great many of the characters in *Sense and Sensibility* it is their foremost concern. Characters almost invariably accompany a person's name with an account of their property, as if the two are inseparable. At times the text almost reads like a property catalogue, or indeed, the front page of national dailies, like the *Morning Chronicle*, taken by the Austens, which were wholly given up to advertisements of properties for sale, with detailed inventories of furniture, china, domestic and outdoor goods of all kinds. Late eighteenth-century society was intensely concerned with wealth and money. The frequent wars during the century had exponentially increased the national debt resulting in higher taxation demands, a grievance constantly featuring in the newspapers. It also enhanced riches for wealthy capitalists able to loan money to government at high returns.

John and Fanny Dashwood represent a propitious union, not at all uncommon in Austen's actual world, of landed wealth with city wealth. It suggests an early stage of what Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, terms 'a developing capitalist order of the land' (p. 139). Mrs Ferrars' desire that her son, Edward, make a figure as an orator in Parliament is driven by no ideal of civic duty to promote national interests. Men 'no more dreamt of a seat in the House in order to benefit humanity than a child dreams of a birthday cake that others may eat it', Lewis Namier writes.[23] Edward's success as a public figure would certainly have gratified his mother's vanity but more importantly it would have opened the way to further wealth-getting. According to Namier, a parliamentary seat was always regarded as a means to self-making and self-enrichment (p. 2). Banking, merchant and political hierarchies were thoroughly interrelated during the last decades of the eighteenth century.[24]

If Edward eschews the path of self-interest, John and Fanny Dashwood are exemplary in their obsessive and competitive acquisitiveness. While all their passions are invested in wealth-getting, their sense of social extension into a shared world of fellow-feeling is practically non-existent. John Dashwood is 'cold hearted, and rather selfish', epithets used throughout the text to indicate those lacking social sympathies and pursuing self-interest. The second chapter of

the novel, in which John is only too ready to accept Fanny's arguments against keeping his promise to his father to provide for his step-sisters, offers a comic drama of the contraction of sympathies to exclude all but self. Fanny's language repeatedly foregrounds the possessive pronouns of the private individualist self as she contrasts the projected impoverishment of 'our poor little boy', John's 'own child' against the claims of Elinor and Marianne who are nor '*really his sisters* [. . .] only half blood' (p. 7). Further contraction of social sympathies is exemplified in Fanny's example of her mother being 'clogged' by her husband's will with the payment of annuities to old superannuated servants so that 'her income was not her own' (p. 8). The chapter closes with Fanny's possessive indignation that her mother-in-law, Mrs Dashwood, has been left all the china, plate and linen from the former household. Again her language emphatically opposes 'our' and 'own' to 'theirs' and 'them' as the discursive structure of competitive, acquisitive individualism.

Land enclosure reached a peak at the end of the eighteenth century, funded in part from increases in landed wealth due to high grain prices and also from investment from merchant and capital sources.[25] In the long term, land enclosure and improvement increased food production but at the time the most obvious result was the impoverishment of many small land-holders, tenant farmers and the agricultural poor who depended on common land for grazing and foraging. Land enclosure provides a materially literal example of the exclusion of others in order to magnify the idea of self by means of possessions. John Dashwood details a typical pattern of enlargement of his property by the 'inclosure of Norland Common' and the purchase of East Kingham Farm, so immediately adjoining his own land 'that I felt it my duty to buy it' (p. 196). 'Duty' here functions typically as an abstract moral euphemism for competitive materialism since 'I might have sold it again the next day, for more than I gave' (p. 197). That the Dashwood's use their property and wealth to compete in the stakes of conspicuous consumption is indicated by a newly fashionable greenhouse and garden Fanny is planning for Norland. Their factitious notion of self as substantiated and magnified by competitive possession demands a continual expansion of their acquisitions of material things. 'English landowners were a class of consumers', Professor Habakkuk notes.[26]

Originally the notion of 'taste' was aligned to Adam Smith's idea of sympathy as responsiveness of feeling extended to the aesthetic realm. By the turn of the century, however, it was increasingly associated with more socially restricted notions of refinement

and consumerism. Taste, as a subjective attribute of the refined interiority, came to be substantiated in the competitive purchase of material things. In *Sense and Sensibility*, those who most ostentatiously pride themselves on their displays of taste, like Lady Middleton, Fanny Dashwood and Mrs Ferrars, are also represented as those most concerned with purely conventional forms of civility as opposed to 'society' as fellowship. Throughout the text, this type of civility is linked to coldness, self-centredness and especially to lack of social sympathies. Fanny is 'narrow-minded and selfish', Lady Middleton 'piqued herself on the elegance of her table' but is 'reserved' and 'cold' and they are attracted to each other by mutual 'cold-hearted selfishness [. . .] [and] an insipid propriety of demeanour' (pp. 3, 27, 200).

Initially Willoughby seems to represent an opposing view of taste, one based upon sympathy and warmth of feeling rather than conspicuous consumption and elegant civility. He enters fully into Marianne's enthusiasms and shares her romantic tastes in music, literature and art. Yet his predatory attitude to women reveals a drive to expand self by means of possession. His callous disregard for the trail of misery he leaves in the wake of his sexual conquests and his loveless marriage to gain a fortune are alike indicative of his ruthless self-interested individualism. Elinor rightly judges him extravagant, 'cold-hearted and selfish' (p. 290). Lucy Steele is another character dominated by competitive self-promotion. As a means of magnifying her own sense of self, she clearly relishes the thrill of power she gains from wounding Elinor. She is even more cold-hearted than Willoughby in swapping lovers purely for financial gain. She earns an unusually direct comment from the narrator, 'The whole of Lucy's behaviour [. . .] and the prosperity that crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune' (p. 331). Were its irony to pass unnoticed, this statement could be read as a comprehensive summary of the moral myth of individualist self-making by struggling against adversity as disseminated or 'held forth' by numerous early nineteenth-century clergymen, moralists, politicians, economists and novelists. Throughout her novels, Austen's hostility to the emergent values of possessive individualism remains unambivalent.

Her representation of subjective individualism is also consistently critical but more complex and nuanced. Marianne, for example, might seem to represent an idea of self derived from a notion of

sensibility and taste more closely aligned to Adam Smith's view of sympathy, based upon fellow feeling. Marianne's sense of her self expands around an imagined identity as unique sensibility. For her, sympathy is demonstrated primarily in reciprocal enthusiasm for favourite music and poetry. 'I could not be happy', she declares, 'with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the same books, the same music must charm us both' (p. 14). Austen's irony here is easily noted: Willoughby '*must* enter into all *my* feelings' (emphasis added).

It is no accident that Austen represents Marianne's especial accomplishment to be piano playing and Elinor's to be drawing. In *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, published posthumously in 1795, and extensively reviewed in 1796–7, Adam Smith contrasts the pleasures arising from both arts. Drawing and painting give delight by the skill of rendering objects in the three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional form as if they are indeed three-dimensional. The aesthetic satisfaction is thus outward-looking, deriving from attentiveness to the empirical world. The pleasure of music, on the other hand, derives not from imitation of external objects, 'but [from] the power of exciting and varying the different moods and dispositions of the mind'.[27] In *Jane Austen's Possessions and Dispossessions*, Sandie Byrne points out that of the possessions unpacked on arrival at Barton Cottage the 'pianoforte is described as Marianne's particular property, but Elinor's drawings are fixed to the walls to become the decoration and property of all'.[28]

Marianne equates knowledge, in the mode of idealist philosophy, with the self-revealed, intuitive truth of the sovereign mind, scorning any reference to an objective social world. For her, truth is a matter of inner feeling and emotional response. She boasts that despite the very short time she has known Willoughby, she is better acquainted with him than with any other creature in the world. 'It is not time,' she claims, 'it is disposition alone' (p. 50). When Elinor criticises her impropriety in driving off alone with Willoughby, she insists that she would have known intuitively if she had been acting wrongly (p. 59).

By the end of the eighteenth century, it had become a commonplace in women's conduct writing across the political spectrum, from Hannah More to Mary Wollstonecraft, to attack the dangers that excessive sensibility posed to vulnerable young women. Undoubtedly, *Sense and Sensibility* shares this concern and Marianne's treatment by Willoughby exemplifies the risk. The satiric treatment of sensibility by Austen also provides a central part of Marilyn Butler's

argument for Austen's political conservatism. Austen's critique of Marianne's claims to sensibility, however, derives from a social, even a radical perspective, and is forward-looking in its historical significance rather than inhering in the narrow evangelical partisanship of revolutionary era politics. Austen's position originates in the sceptical empiricism of Hume and Smith in their quarrel with idealism as imposing totalising systems of thought regardless of evidence from the material world.

Austen uses one of the key terms of Smith's accusation against idealism's totalising tendency when Elinor criticises Marianne's enthusiasm for her 'systems' of thought which are based upon an 'ignorance of the world' (p. 48). Conceptual systems, according to Hume, rely upon imagination and the exclusion of external reality. Adam Smith warned against 'the man of system'.[29] Idealism, its critics claimed, facilitates the expansion of subjective self by disavowing or rendering imperceptible anything contrary to a wished for mental reality. When Marianne declares she could love no man whose taste did not in every point coincide with her own, it is not fellow feeling she is affirming but the desire to subsume the world into her own subjective identity. Marianne, with all her excellent abilities and disposition, says the narrator, 'expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself' (p. 175). As David Hume pointed out, one of the dangers of this subjectivism is the imaginary association of ideas into coherent mental systems so that wishes and illusions come to seem reality. Colonel Brandon says, 'Where the mind is perhaps rather unwilling to be convinced, it will always find something to support its doubts' (p. 150). Mrs Dashwood comically demonstrates this truth in reverse; where the mind is willing, rational doubt is easily excluded. Once she learns of Brandon's love for Marianne she is immediately 'carried away by her imagination' and her 'active fancy [. . .] fashioned every thing delightful to her' as to her daughter's future (p. 295).

This easy transition of ideas and wishes into firm systems of belief is facilitated by an assumed contempt for materiality. Like most idealists, Marianne pretends to scorn worldly things. 'What have wealth and grandeur to do with happiness', she proclaims romantically. When Elinor mischievously enquires what she considers a moderate establishment, Marianne produces a very material list: servants, one or two carriages and hunters. In a similar way, she accepts Willoughby's offer of a horse without the least consideration of the enormous additional expense this would involve for her mother: 'Most unwilling was she to

awaken from such a dream of felicity, to comprehend all the unhappy truths which attended the affair' (p. 49).

A regime of perceptibility structured vertically by the dominance of mind over matter renders the physical realm inconsequential, of no account. The socially divisive effect of contempt for the material world is its tendency to downgrade the commonality of embodied human existence which forms the basis of fellowship and sympathy. The high esteem placed upon private interiority, mediated as refinement of individual taste, functions as a mechanism of social exclusion, justifying disregard, even contempt, for others. While Marianne is narcissistically charmed by Willoughby because he 'acquiesced in all her decisions, caught all her enthusiasm', she dismisses Colonel Brandon as possessing 'neither genius, taste, nor spirit' (p. 44). These perceived imperfections of Brandon's mind, Elinor suggests, rest upon 'your own imagination'. Marianne similarly projects her intolerance upon the kindly if loquacious Mrs Jennings. Despite all the objective evidence of Mrs Jennings's compassionate sympathies, Marianne insists upon excluding her from any possible fellowship, 'she cannot feel. Her kindness is not sympathy; her good nature is not tenderness. All she wants is gossip' (pp. 174–5). As her last sentence here suggests, Marianne is actually making a judgement based upon a system of social prejudice and passing it off to herself as a matter of her own superior innate sensibility and the other's lack of the same delicacy of feeling.

Yet once convinced that some fellow humans have no feelings of value, it becomes possible to treat them as beings without a self worthy of note. A vertical, idealist regime of the perceptible constitutes the labouring poor, the uneducated, superannuated servants and those to be cleared away for land enclosure, as wholly insignificant existences. Marianne, comments the narrator, 'had never much toleration for any thing like impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of taste from herself' (p. 109). Far from being implicated in revolutionary ardour, as Butler claims, sensibility, as productive of a notion of self constituted as refined interiority, became, especially as the nineteenth century progressed, a powerful means of social exclusion.

A new distribution of the perceptible rendered the polite, private bodies of the respectable invisible, while the bodies of the poor became the focus of public attention as indices of troubling inferiority. Roy Porter comments, 'The representatives of gross corporeality were the vulgar, the labouring poor; élites upheld their own superiority as creatures of mind rather than base matter.'[30] He concludes,

'The doctrine of mind over matter stood for power over the people'
(p. 474). As Rancière notes, changes in the regime of the percep-
tible are always political. At the turn of the eighteenth century, it
is Austen's prescient insight that both emergent ideologies of self,
acquisitive individualism and subjective individualism, entailed an
expansion of the idea of self upon the world and, at the same time, a
radical retraction of sympathies, and of any horizontal sense of self
as part of extended social and embodied being. The respectable self is
privatised. Commonness becomes synonymous with the vulgar.

Sir John Middleton and Mrs Jennings, his mother-in-law, are the
two characters in the novel who most exemplify an earlier tradition
of self as both social and embodied. Indeed, Sir John represents his
sense of sociability almost entirely in terms of food. On the Dash-
woods' arrival at Barton Cottage he sends the family a large basket
of garden stuff, followed by a gift of game (p. 25). Their comfort,
as this unsolicited generosity suggests, is 'an object of real solicitude
to him' and he is vociferous as to 'his earnest desire of their liv-
ing in the most sociable terms with his family' (p. 25). His gregari-
ous enthusiasm offends current notions of civility as upheld by his
wife. Inclusive sociability was becoming old-fashioned in a culture
increasingly valorising the more restricted virtues of the private and
domestic. By contrast, 'Sir John's satisfaction in society was [. . .]
real; he delighted in collecting about him more young people than
his house could hold [. . .] in summer he was forever forming parties
to eat cold ham and chicken out of doors' (p. 27). In this passage,
as throughout the novel, Austen is again using the words 'sociable'
and 'society' in the older sense to suggest fellowship and social being.
While Lady Middleton enjoys entertaining in order to show off her
domestic elegance, Sir John is frequently planning informal outdoor
meals. Austen repeatedly stresses Sir John's *real* feelings in opposi-
tion to what is recurrently described in the text as 'cold civility', a
politeness without fellow feeling.

Mrs Jennings is introduced as 'a good-humoured, merry, fat,
elderly woman, who talked a great deal and seemed [. . .] rather
vulgar' (pp. 28–9). Judging by this description, refined readers
might well expect her to be a figure of fun. Yet, over narrative time,
it becomes apparent that her sterling qualities are far more impor-
tant than any deficiencies in civility. Objective judgement, based
upon evidence, corrects first opinion. Mrs Jennings is one of those
characters in Austen's fiction who seems to reach back into much
older popular traditions, associated as she is with those carnival
qualities of birth, food and merriment. Mrs Jennings has affinities

with a character like Juliet's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. She has the same robust interest in marriage and procreation, proclaiming enthusiastically of her pregnant daughter, Charlotte, 'I warrant you she is a fine size by this time' (p. 141). She regales Elinor with all the details of her husband's last illness and death (p. 46). As this suggests, Mrs Jennings has no notion at all of the self as private; she is a wholly social being. For her, relationships and alliances are warp and woof of a communal sphere of sociability and her desire to know all that is going on provokes her to question acquaintances without the least sense of indelicacy at encroaching upon a private realm. Believing Colonel Brandon to have been involved in matters concerning what she has termed 'a love child', she accosts him, 'Come, come, let's have no secrets among friends' (p. 141). The many secrets in the text are, in fact, an index of the encroachment of the private upon the social.

In the story, it is Mrs Jennings who represents the antithesis of idealist disavowal of the flesh. Her earthy understanding of people as embodied beings rather than interior sensibilities determines her practical expressions of fellowship and kindness. In contrast to her daughter-in-law's fastidious disavowal of the fleshly, her satisfaction, like Sir John's, comes from providing creature comforts. On the journey to London she is solicitous for everything that could ensure Elinor's and Marianne's ease and enjoyment, insisting upon a choice of salmon, cod, boiled fowls or veal cutlets when they stop for dinner (p. 138). In London, once she learns of Marianne's unhappiness she treats her 'with all the indulgent fondness of a parent towards a favourite child', ensuring she has 'the best place by the fire' and is tempted 'to eat by every delicacy in the house' including some of 'the finest old Constantia wine' (pp. 167, 171). She refuses to leave Elinor alone to tend Marianne in her illness, declaring that by her attentive care she will supply the place of their mother. This 'kindness of heart [. . .] made Elinor really love her' and in all the fatigues of the sick-room she found in Mrs Jennings 'a most willing and active helpmate' (p. 269). The final biblical word, here, is a forceful and striking term to express sympathetic fellowship.

Mrs Jennings meets all of life with the same material practicality, disregarding the mores of new civility. When she believes that Lucy and Edward will start upon an impoverished married life, she cries, 'Aye, we all know how *that* will end [. . .] they will have a child every year! And Lord help 'em!' Her immediate response, in sharp contrast to the mercenary deliberations of Mrs Ferrars and Fanny and John Dashwood, is 'I must see what I can give them

towards furnishing their house', declaring of Mrs Ferrars, 'I have no notion of people's making such a to-do about money and greatness' (pp. 241, 225). The earthy vigour of Mrs Jennings's discourse derives much of its force from roots in demotic speech. Deploring the imminent departure of Elinor and Marianne home to Barton, she exclaims to Colonel Brandon, 'Lord! We shall sit and gape at one another as dull as two cats' (p. 245). In the redistribution of the perceptible, imposed by a new regulatory regime of privacy, the vigorous insistence upon life as embodied, as represented by Mrs Jennings's voice, would become mute.

In the representation of Sir John and especially Mrs Jennings, therefore, Austen elegises the ethos of sociability that would be sacrificed in a culture dedicated to private individualism, whether in the form of materialist possessiveness or idealist interiority. The perceptibility of embodied existence that underwrites extended sympathies and fellow feeling drops out of sight. This is not to suggest that Austen is indulgently nostalgic in her treatment. Both Mrs Jennings and Sir John are the objects of her ironic comedy. Their constant, undiscriminating geniality can seem inappropriate and even tedious. More damagingly, their refusal of any space for a private self is shown to lead to insensitivity that can be wounding. While Austen clearly views the coming order of acquisitive individualism with dismay and dislike and the development of idealist values with concern and scepticism, she does not turn away from change as such. For the Dashwood women, the loss of Norland impels them into processes that cause insecurity and pain but their lives are opened up to wider experiences and to new possibilities that are ultimately empowering.

In Elinor, Austen explores the tensions arising from the conflicting claims of the private and the social self. As such, Elinor represents Austen's projection of a potentially progressive modern sensibility. In contrast to the acquisitive self that desires to possess ever more of the world and the subjective self intent upon shaping the world to its own desires, Elinor's sensibility expresses a worldly sense of self as horizontally part of the larger social whole. Her behaviour is grounded in toleration of others even if their values differ from her own. She tells her mother, 'I will not raise objections against anyone's conduct on so illiberal a foundation, as a difference in judgement from myself, or a deviation from what I may think right and consistent' (p. 70). This does not constitute a collapse into relativism, however. When Marianne accuses her of advocating subservience to the judgements of neighbours, Elinor's response is firm and unequivocal.

'My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding,' she insists, 'I confess [. . .] often having wished you to treat our acquaintance in general with greater attention; but when have I advised you to adopt their sentiments or conform to their judgements in serious matters?' (p. 81).

The irony, of course, is that this is precisely what Marianne *does* insist upon from others, that they conform to her sentiments and judgements. Elinor's principles, outlined in these two statements above, place her centrally in the Enlightenment tradition of David Hume and Adam Smith in their insistence on tolerance and sympathetic fellowship, their hostility to idealism as an imposition of self and systems of belief. Often in the story, Elinor occupies a position like that of Smith's impartial observer, able to enter into a much wider range of perspectives than those characters enclosed in self-interest or their own interiority. Elinor's artistic ability is drawing, an art that Adam Smith praises for its comprehensiveness of observation.

Critics have pointed to Austen's sustained use of forensic language in the story where terms like 'proof', 'evidence', 'grounds' and 'conviction' abound. In fact, this linguistic preoccupation was quite common within the general discourse of the time due to the exponential increase in empirical experiments and observations. This was not a specialist discourse conducted only within a small scientific community; it constituted a shared account of the common world. The investigations were discussed at length in the literary quarterlies aimed at a wide readership among the whole of the educated class. In 1794, the *Monthly Review*, for example, carried a substantial article on Thomas Beddoes, *Observations on the Nature of Demonstrative Evidence* (1793).[31] Every issue of the journal throughout that decade carried articles evaluating the observations and evidence put forward in published works on electricity, chemistry, medicine, agriculture, mathematics, mineralogy and many other empirical studies.

In contrast to most other characters who nourish secrets and subjective illusions, Elinor consistently attempts to order her judgements and behaviour upon empirical evidence. In so doing she asserts her realist faith in a shared world. Rather than elevating mind over matter, Elinor respects the substance of materiality, the things, that constitute the common world. When Lucy reveals her secret engagement to Edward, Elinor 'dared no longer doubt; supported as [Lucy's claim] was too on every side by such probabilities and proofs, and contradicted by nothing but her [Elinor's] own wishes [. . .] the picture, the letter, the ring, formed altogether such a body of evidence, as overcame every fear of condemning him unfairly, and established

as a fact, which no partiality could set aside, his ill-treatment of her-self' (p. 119). Like a true empiricist, Elinor challenges wishes with things and facts. When she begins to doubt the honesty of Willough-by's intentions she resolves to gain 'every new light as to his character which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her' (p. 137).

Although Elinor accepts the challenge of empirical evidence, the novel does not subscribe to naive actualism. In the tradition of David Hume's epistemological scepticism, the text foregrounds the unpredictability of events and the partiality and fallibility of human perspectives. Indeed, Austen gains much of her comedy from the incongruous mismatch between characters' desiring interpretations and conflicting actuality, often in the shape of other people's desires and interpretations. The innovative narrative technique of free indi-rect speech she develops to exploit these comic fallibilities owes much to Adam Smith's novelistic exposition of interactive shifts of perspec-tive through first, second and third person points of view. Yet, in contrast to her characters' attachment to their own systems of belief, authorial omniscience is denied totalising knowledge. Understanding of people and things is certainly asserted to be possible and shar-able, but never final. In each Austen novel there comes a moment or moments when the narrator admits to lack of knowledge or of words that can adequately convey a state of affairs.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, when Edward is told by Elinor of Colonel Brandon's offer of a living that will allow him to marry Lucy, the nar-rator comments, 'What Edward felt, as he could not say it himself, it cannot be expected that anyone else should say for him' (p. 252). At the end of the story, when Elinor's future prospects are even more radically transformed, the narrator asks, 'But Elinor – How are *her* feelings to be described?' (p. 318). The explicit and implicit semantics of those two sentences are, as always with Austen, complex. Clearly, they mark out a space of interiority as private, an acceptance that the press of memories, impressions, hopes and fears can be so intense and fluid as to be knowable to no-one but the experiencing self, and perhaps not even fully by them.

Yet the interpellative logic of Austen's sentences draws the reader into a communicative space with the narrator in which the implicit norm *is* of shared communication of feelings, of distributed con-sciousness. It is only the existence of this norm that gives force to the exceptions of these two cases. Indeed, without such a norm there could be no shared life. The constitution of intersubjective conscious-ness between narrator and reader is a pervasive means by which

Austen produces that sense of an interactive familiar community that is the experience of reading her novels. Austen's innovative prose foregrounds the linguistic structures of a shared world paradoxically at the very moment when the notion of it comes under attack from an ethos of privacy.

Partly the sense of inclusivity is achieved by the innovative motility of Austen's language, its fluid ability to slide horizontally across linguistic temporalities as well as different consciousnesses. The sudden movement into the present tense, as in 'How are *her* feelings to be described', provides a good example, bridging as it does the past tense of the story and a present narrative moment shared by implied teller and implied listener/reader. The effect of immediacy, in her prose, is further strengthened by Austen's frequent use of deictics, especially 'now'. 'I come now to the relation of a misfortune', the narrator directly informs the reader, implying a shared temporal space. When Chapter 5 opens, 'The Dashwoods were now settled at Barton' the reader is effectively brought into the time and space of the story as well as that of the narrator. By such means Austen gives linguistic substance to the intersubjective experience that is communal reality.

This writerly constitution of consciousness as shared and fluid contributes equally to a sense of self as non-bounded and inconclusive. David Hartley saw the self as always emergent and factitious. Austen's characters convey a very similar sense. Frequently, they seem at one and the same time wholly familiar yet startling and unpredictable. Character speech not only suggests unspoken currents of thought but equally the force of non-verbal energies. Self, for Austen, is an embodied performance, like that of the Steele sisters and Marianne, for example, but a performance driven by needs and passions. There are those, moreover, like Mr Palmer and Fanny Dashwood, who seem to exist at the edge of performative excess. These qualities are perhaps those that earlier critics were recognising when they refer to Austen's dialogue as Shakespearian. The effect is a sense of identity as resistant to any final interpretive closure.

The social self, for Austen, is also inseparable from the world of things. Her novels mark the initiating moment in which consumer goods of all kinds become active forces shaping individual identity and social structures. In *Sense and Sensibility*, shops and purchases feature prominently in the text. Shops can be understood as metonymies of a public sphere largely structured upon consumption. On the very first day of their stay in London, Elinor and Marianne accompany Mrs Jennings and Mrs Palmer on a shopping trip. Thereafter

they make several other trips to shops in Pall Mall and Bond Street. These occasions are represented by Austen as social events in the public sphere as much as they are purchasing opportunities. Women do not shop singly, friends are met and gossip and news exchanged. These interactions are shown to be part of the interdependent dynamics of the public and private spheres, in that they lead to further social events, opinion forming and the circulation of rumour and information as well as cash.

Consumer goods also function as metonymies for the public constitution of self. Miss Grey's wedding clothes are put on display in a fashionable warehouse (p. 187). Men, too, use things to signify their identity as wealthy connoisseurs of taste. Robert Ferrars exploits the public purchase of a toothpick to demonstrate the 'correctness of his eye and the delicacy of his taste' (p. 192). Willoughby contemptuously dismisses Colonel Brandon as the kind of man who only buys two suits a year, while Marianne insists that the Colonel's flannel waistcoats are attributes of age and ailment (pp. 44, 32).

It is ironic that Marianne, who insists upon the priority of mind over matter, should be so quick to judge Brandon's person by his clothing. What the text shows, comically, is that the most sublime and intense experiences of the subjective self depend upon common things for substantiation. Even moments of romantic intimacy require the banal mediation of material objects as catalogued by Margaret's account of seeing Willoughby take up Marianne's scissors, cut off a long lock of her hair, and fold it 'in a piece of white paper, and put it into his pocket book' (p. 51). When Willoughby leaves abruptly without explanation, Marianne would have thought herself inexcusable if she had been able to sleep or eat (p. 71). Yet despite rejection of what is offensively material to her emotional state, she turns to objects that are just as material to express her grief. She spends hours playing the pianoforte and reading the books they had shared. Taste, as a means of expressing transcendent sensibility, is, moreover, just as inseparable from the economics of consumption as is taste as conspicuous display. Austen is typically astute as to the hard cash necessary to substantiate and maintain the inner life. Edward fantasises on the 'magnificent orders' that would flow to London booksellers, music-sellers and print-shops should the family come into a fortune. Knowing Marianne's 'greatness of soul', Edward claims, 'there would not be music enough in London to content her' (p. 79). How else is the soul to know its greatness or estimate its qualities if not substantiated by material things and practices?

It is undoubtedly significant that Edward, Elinor and Colonel Brandon all disclaim at various moments what the Colonel calls 'pretensions to connoisseurship', a term newly current in the eighteenth century (p. 205). They do not use things either to extend the acquisitiveness of the competitive self or to substantiate interior sensibility. Brandon listens attentively to Marianne at the pianoforte but without 'being in raptures' (p. 30). Elinor, too, makes no claim to musical taste, and is unrestrained 'by the presence of a harp and violoncello', from turning her eyes to 'other objects in the room' (p. 218). Edward stubbornly refuses to associate things with sensibility and his interchange with Marianne brings to the surface the opposing politics of the material versus the ideal, empirical facts versus an abstract system of belief. 'How can you think of dirt, with such objects before you?' Marianne exclaims. Edward replies, 'Because [. . .] among the rest of the objects before me, I see a very dirty lane' (p. 76). He goes on to insist that he prefers tall, flourishing trees to crooked, blasted ones, he dislikes tattered cottages, nettles and thistles, and takes pleasure in a troop of tidy, happy villagers (p. 84). This last image of contented poor may suggest patrician complacency. Yet, that negative judgement needs to be balanced with recognition that tattered cottages and weeds indicate the poverty of tattered, ill-clad, undernourished inhabitants and of neglect by landowners. During the peak of the enclosure movement at the end of the eighteenth century, and with rural hardship and unrest increasing, Edward's preference does not seem reactionary. Romantic rapture at 'tattered cottages' provides as little to ameliorate pressing material needs as does indulgence in extravagant display.

Political ideologies are also at stake in a material site of even greater import for self, sensibility and taste than that of landscape, namely, the ideology of home, of domesticity. This prime location of the private self is, of course, constituted by things, common objects. When the Dashwoods move into Barton Cottage they endeavour, 'by placing around them their books and other possessions, to form themselves a home' (p. 25). Again, material things produce the subjective values. 'Home' is an important and recurrent term in the text. The idealisation of domesticity and the shift of values from the public to the domestic, occurring from the latter part of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth is a well-documented aspect of British patriotic and moral discourse. There is an easily recognisable metaphoric transformation of the concrete into the ideal in the movement from hearth to home to domesticity to Englishness. *Sense and Sensibility* is undoubtedly participating in this discursive

domain. The ideology of the home as a privileged sanctuary that sustains the competitive struggle in the public sphere underwrote the increasing privacy of the family and its individualistic ethos. In *Englishness Identified*, Paul Langford notes that even foreigners and overseas visitors to Britain commented upon the fervent belief in home life that most English people espoused. Yet, visitors also noticed the devaluing of more general sociability and fellowship. Festive days based upon commonality beyond the home were neglected in England. Langford quotes an Austrian diplomat who concludes, 'it proves how little the English feel it necessary to give proof of their good feeling to each other'.[32]

Where does *Sense and Sensibility* position itself within the shifting semantic-political field of domestic values? It is certainly not privacy that is stressed in the text. Mrs Dashwood's first thought on settling in Barton is of enlarging the cottage so that they can accommodate 'such parties of our friends as I hope to see often collected here' (p. 24). In the meantime, she hopes they can make themselves 'tolerably comfortable'. The notion of comfort is much associated with the word 'home' in the narrative, as in national discourse. Elinor recognises that Edward's mother does not make 'his home comfortable' to him and Edward himself later repeats this phrase (pp. 18, 318). When Mrs Jennings is praising Delaford as Marianne's future home if she marries Colonel Brandon, she calls it a 'nice, old-fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences' (p. 170). Willoughby comes to love Barton Cottage 'as his home' (p. 61). In his discussion of English domesticity, Langford points out that the 'idea of comfort was a subject of endless debate both at home and abroad', the more so since there existed no obvious synonym for comfort in other languages (*Englishness*, p. 117).

Part of the semantic field constituting the ideology of English domestic comfort was the idea of warmth, a notion that moves effortlessly from the material basis of life to the metaphorical, subjective domain. Within *Sense and Sensibility* almost all the characters are categorised as either cold-hearted or warm-hearted. Not surprisingly, fires and fireplaces are among the domestic things referred to in the text. Warmth and creature comforts were quintessentially associated with the open fire typical of English domestic interiors as opposed to the stoves in continental countries (*Englishness*, pp. 116–17). In national discourse and in its physical substance 'the hearth' undoubtedly operates as a 'gathering' in Bruno Latour's sense of a point of intersection of many meaning systems ('Why has Critique', p. 170). Both in the public sphere and in *Sense and*

Sensibility 'the hearth' resonates across the discursive domains of traditionalism, patriotism, reaction and reform.

The emotional leverage of the hearth within domestic ideology, for example, was intensified by nostalgic connotations of older, partly mythic, traditions of a merry England in which peasantry and nobility gathered in fellowship around Yule logs blazing in the squire's feudal halls. The character in *Sense and Sensibility* most closely associated with a comforting fire is Mrs Jennings. After a three-day journey to London, Elinor and Marianne are grateful to enjoy 'all the luxury of a good fire' (p. 138). When she learns of Marianne's unhappiness, Mrs Jennings makes sure that she has 'the best place by the fire' (p. 167). This association with both physical warmth and sympathetic warmth accords with Austen's depiction of Mrs Jennings as not only representative of an older ethos of sociability, as opposed to privacy, but also of an earlier way of envisaging human life as shared and embodied.

It is not only Mrs Jennings who is associated with fireplaces and sociability. Mrs Dashwood wants to put a new grate into the spare bedroom in readiness for guests (p. 33). Her plans to enlarge the cottage, however, meet with passionate resistance from Willoughby. He declares he would not sacrifice one sentiment of local attachment for all the improvements in the world. In response, Elinor asks him whether he finds even 'a kitchen that smokes' desirable (p. 62). This is almost certainly a reference out to the world of things beyond the text. In particular, it alludes to Count Rumford's invention of a stove that eliminated the smoky fires of traditional building. Count Rumford was much in the news during the years Austen was writing the novel. There were lengthy discussions of his ideas in *Monthly Review* throughout the 1790s. The *Review* praised him as a man who was practical as well as philosophical and who had made a real improvement to the comforts of ordinary life.[33]

Not everyone was in favour of Rumford, however. In a politically factional world, innovation was regarded at best with suspicion by conservatives. One reactionary commentator expresses his opposition in terms not so unlike those of Willoughby, 'Rumford, by his *philosophical* chimneys, is likely to destroy the comforts of our firesides. When will reformers and sciolists meet with that contempt which they deserve!' (Langford, *Englishness*, p. 117). There is no doubt that, at the time, the reference to philosophy would bring to many English minds thoughts of the French *philosophes* whose scepticism and anti-religious sentiments were held by many in Britain to have precipitated the Revolution.

Indeed, it was not just chimney innovations that accounted for Rumford's unpopularity among those of conservative opinion. One of his publications, *Essays, Political, Economical and Philosophical* (1796), provides an account of his administration of poor relief in Munich. The *Monthly Review* quoted a lengthy passage that would have offended all those insisting that the indigent must be made to espouse the moral discipline of sturdy individualism. Rumford writes, 'To make vicious and abandoned people happy, it has generally been supposed necessary, *first*, to make them virtuous. But why not reverse this order? Why not make them first *happy* and then virtuous? If happiness and virtue be *inseparable*, the end will be as certainly obtained by the one method as by the other [. . .] [therefore] Every thing was done that could be devised to make the poor people I had to deal with comfortable and happy in their new situation.'[34] On 21 October 1800, the Austens' daily paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, printed a letter to the editor advocating the adoption of Count Rumford's system for ameliorating the condition of the poor.[35]

It is, of course, impossible to know what Austen would have made of such comments if she read them. They do, however, provide an intriguing gloss on Edward's preference, like Rumford's, for 'happy villagers' over 'tattered cottages' and on Willoughby's defence of nostalgic sentiment despite the consequent discomfort to servants in a smoky kitchen. What is certain is that when homes are re-formed at the close of the novel the emphasis is upon social being not individualistic privacy. Mrs Jennings, the text's representative of sociability, is the first to visit Elinor and Edward at their parsonage. Once Marianne has married Colonel Brandon there is 'constant communication' between Barton and Delaford (p. 335). The ending of the novel, and especially Marianne's marriage, have left some readers disquieted. What is less noticed is that it indicates a rejection by Marianne of the narcissistic subjectivism that sought to impose self and its systems upon the world. This critical blindness to Marianne's blindness on the part of present-day readers is, perhaps, an index of the still powerful charm of the ideology of individualistic interiority.

True to the realist grounding of the story, however, Marianne finally accepts that her passionate opinions and principles have been tested by experience and observation and proved false. She acknowledges the empirical reality that constitutes a shared world. For modern readers, however, there is a further jarring note to the description of her 'submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed

in a new home, a wife, mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village' (p. 333). Undoubtedly, an element of the condescension of the lady of the manor is evoked by the term 'patroness'.

Austen's plot structures articulate a movement of social change from a settled world to one that is more socially fluid and open. Nevertheless, Austen never conceives a world that is not ordered by rank. Yet, in the context of the novel's critique of the self-expansionism of acquisitive individualism and the imposition of self upon the world by subjective idealism, one should perhaps also recognise the emphasis upon the outgoing social inter-activeness of Marianne's new roles. The text perhaps implies that Marianne will be more passionately concerned with the happiness of the village in terms of material needs than with its supply of picturesque, blasted trees.

There is also a gender inflection in the outline of Marianne's new position. She does indeed enter on new duties as a wife, but the terms 'mistress of a family' and 'patroness of a village' seem to emphasise empowerment rather than conventional feminine submission. The submission, if there is one, is of the private interiority to the social self. *Sense and Sensibility* opens by expelling its two young female protagonists from the security of the patriarchal home. By its conclusion, both Elinor and Marianne have moved into a larger material world. They have, however, retained a sense of self as social being, rejecting both privatised interiority and acquisitive competitiveness. As so often in Austen's fiction, the close of the narrative hints at the formation of a new, potentially dissensual, social order, worldly rather than idealist, horizontal rather than vertical, and one in which women have an active and intelligent public role to play.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 141.
2. Walter Scott, 'Unsigned Review of *Emma*', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 14 [1816], in Ian Littlewood, ed., *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols, 1.287–8.
3. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, pp. 3–30; *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, pp. ix-xvi, 1–20.
4. Richard Whately, 'Unsigned Review: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 24 [1821], in *Critical Assessments*, 1.318–19.
5. George Henry Lewes, in B. C. Southam, ed., *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, p. 166.
6. James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections* [1870], pp. 9, 140–1.

 7. *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4.149.
 8. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 338.
 9. Ian Watt, ed., *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 2.
10. Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*.
11. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, pp. 146–83; Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*.
12. Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, pp. 13–14; *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s*.
13. Edward Neill, *The Politics of Jane Austen*, p. 4.
14. Wm H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen*, p. 1.
15. Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, p. 5.
16. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 101.
17. Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, p. 171.
18. Elizabeth Hamilton, *A Series of Popular Lectures*, 1.279.
19. Bruno Latour, 'Why has Critique Run Out of Steam: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', p. 170.
20. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, p. 1.
21. Marvin B. Becker, *The Emergence of Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century: A Privileged Moment in the History of England, Scotland, and France*, p. 2.
22. Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798*, p. 1.
23. Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, p. 2.
24. For an account of the various interests see Richard Price, *British Society 1680–1880: Dynamism, Containment and Change*, pp. 67–75.
25. For an account of this see Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750–1985*, pp. 1–3.
26. H. J. Habakkuk, *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century*, quoted in Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 144.
27. Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 2. 22.198; Smith also describes the utility of music to those, like Marianne, who seek to 'either indulge the ecstasy or give way to the agony' of passionate feelings (2.12.191).
28. Sandie Byrne, *Jane Austen's Possessions and Dispossessions: The Significance of Objects*, p. 34
29. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 275.
30. Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 472.
31. *Monthly Review*, 1794, vol. 13, pp. 1–7.

32. Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650–1850*, p. 109.
33. *Monthly Review*, Review of Count Rumford, *Essays, Political, Economical and Philosophical*, 1796, vol. 21, pp. 66–70; *Monthly Review*, Review of Count Rumford, *Experimental Essays, Political, Economical and Philosophical*, 1794, vol. 24, pp. 319–32; Austen refers explicitly to Rumford in *Northanger Abbey* as part of her negative depiction of General Tilney's hypocritical posturing as an enlightened property owner. See Marilyn Butler's editorial note in *Northanger Abbey* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 252.
34. *Monthly Review*, Review of Count Rumford, 1796, vol. 21, p. 68.
35. *Morning Chronicle*, 21 October 1800.