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Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and Worldly Realism

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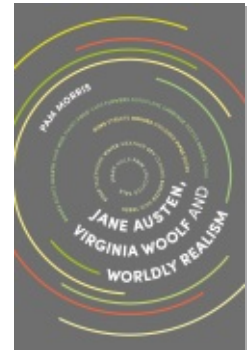
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Part III

Guns and Plumbing

Persuasion: Fellow Creatures

Austen frequently condenses into the opening of her novels intimations of the themes and ideological debates that will structure the entire narrative. Nowhere is this condensation of narrative concerns achieved with more effective economy than in the first paragraph of *Persuasion* (1816) where the final phrase ‘ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH-HALL’ circles back, mirror-like, to repeat the opening words.¹ This narcissistic formation comically figures Sir Walter’s essentialist pride in the accidents of appearance and title while the subsequent four repetitions of ‘there’ within the single sentence point to the solipsistic fixation of Sir Walter’s imagined idea of self as in every sense entitled. The circularity of the paragraph structure mimics Sir Walter’s denial of time and change within his own mental world, expressed by him as contempt for those unable to resist the material depredations of empirical temporality. By contrast, the actual physical vulnerability of all creaturely life and the processes of change to which it is necessarily subject are relentlessly foregrounded by the many accidents and illnesses that recur throughout the narrative. Mrs Clay’s hypocritical assumption of elitist hauteur when she declares that only those not obliged to work hold the blessings of ‘health and good appearance to the utmost’ is more literally true than she perhaps realises (p. 23).

The recognition of life as physically embodied derives from Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume, David Hartley and Elizabeth Hamilton, a perception that challenges the Cartesian mind–body hierarchy. It is this materialist perception of human nature that informs Austen’s radical representation of self and consciousness as a biological, emotional, rational and social dynamic. In so doing, she inaugurates a redistribution of the perceptible. In the representation of Sir Walter she turns into caricature the idealist verisimilitude which, Jacques Rancière claims, ‘asserts a naturalised affinity between characters, situations and forms of expression’.²

Sir Walter's class essentialism constructs an absolute congruence between self, rank, physical body, speech and action. In opposition to this myth of congruent identity, the novel asserts a heterogeneous, biological and communal recognition of human existence. Rancière claims that a new inclusive regime of writing institutes a form of realism embraced by modernist writers. Undoubtedly, Austen's innovative realism, especially in *Persuasion*, looks directly forward to Virginia Woolf's equally materialist perception and representation of the horizontal continuities of consciousness and world.

It is not only the idealism of the classic self that Austen rejects. She is also highly critical of the solipsistic enclosure of any self-contained social world. The looking-glass constitution of Sir Walter's class-bound mentality, within the first paragraph, is repeated in other mental worlds represented in the text that are cut off from and unchallenged by larger empirical realities. The shallow surface implication of the mirror image, moreover, suggests the emptiness, the lack of substance, beneath the pride of title, rank and estate. Kellynch-hall rests upon debt; the metaphoricity of 'place' as inherited order, in this final completed Austen novel, has been hollowed out. The idealist claims of enduring honour, reverence and dignity, associated by Edmund Burke with a landowning, patrician order, no longer endure.

Given the ridicule directed at Sir Walter in the story, it is not surprising that many critics have read the novel as expressing a radical change in Austen's social views. David Monaghan, for example, argues that *Persuasion* deals with Austen's painful realisation that the social order upheld by her previous novels is 'finally falling apart'.³ Roger Sales even suggests that '*Persuasion* [. . .] casts doubt on the benefits to be derived from male lines of descent'.⁴ Mary Poovey also believes that Austen intends the moral bankruptcy of Sir Walter to be read as condemnatory of the entire patriarchal landed class and Tony Tanner emphasises what he sees as the fragmentation of community and language in the social world that Austen represents.⁵ This sense of radical change in Austen's perception of the social order is not a consensual view of the politics of *Persuasion*, however. Alistair Duckworth warns that 'one should be careful not to overemphasise the modernity of *Persuasion*'.⁶ Austen is not rejecting the ethical values of a conservative social morality, he argues, but rather displacing those values from the estate onto the character of her heroine. David Spring substantiates this non-radical view of the novel in a reading that emphasises the many social continuities between the traditional country gentry class, as represented by the Musgrove family, and the

naval officers that some critics have claimed to be a new progressive order.⁷ John Wiltshire agrees with Spring's reading of *Persuasion* as expressing continuity of Austen's social values rather than any break, suggesting that 'radical' readings are motivated by a critical need to 'vindicate or explain Jane Austen's status as a canonical or classic author' by attributing to her an interest in social theory which is unwarranted by the texts.⁸

One recurrent weakness within this debate as to Austen's conservatism or radicalism is a lack of precision in discussing the fluid social and political allegiances and divisions of Austen's world: for instance, the interpenetration of city finance with landed wealth as represented in *Sense and Sensibility*, or the intermix of emulation and rivalry in Mrs Elton's approach to Emma Woodhouse. The deployment of terms like 'gentry', 'middle class', or 'landowners' in discussions of Austen's novels are at times too static and homogeneous in implication to comprehend the complex dynamics of the social world that the fiction represents. This world is not that of idealised rural seclusion as favoured in 'heritage' interpretations of her novels. Neither is it constituted of a stark binary opposition between patrician values and middle-class ambition. As Robert Clark and Gerry Dutton show, Jane Austen's father was not simply a rural rector. Much of the family income was tied up in his farm and hence dependent on the fluctuating price of corn and sheep, prices that were at the centre of some of the most contested politics of the era. Consequently, 'Jane Austen's mentality was formed in a household very much [. . .] engaged with the shaping forces of the British economy.'⁹ Nicholas Roe claims Austen's novels 'typically focus on sections of English society that inhabit the vulnerable cusp or borderline between different groups and classes, so that we are always aware of the extraordinary mobility of English society.'¹⁰ Moreover, this social mobility is inseparable from and shaped by transformations in material forces: agricultural innovations, the explosion of consumerism, improved transport, technology and industrial expansion.

My argument throughout this study is that Austen's novels persistently enact the inevitability of change and dramatise this process in the narrative experience of her female protagonists, encompassing a transition from stability to mobility, from social homogeneity to social heterogeneity. Undoubtedly, this transition grows increasingly marked in the later novels but it does not entail any radical break in Austen's social perspective. Land, for Edmund Burke, represents permanence, it embodies the eternal order of the nation.¹¹ Alistair Duckworth aligns Austen with Burke in her representation of the

estate as 'symbolic of an entire inherited culture' (*The Improvement*, p. 55). The properly run estate, Duckworth claims, functions in the novels as 'an objective paradigm of order', a source of stability (*The Improvement*, p. 184). For John Wiltshire, *Persuasion* 'is a study in the moral atmosphere of place' (*Jane Austen*, p. 161). Traditional, inherited place does undoubtedly operate in the metaphorical mode throughout Austen's fiction, embodying idealist values of settled order, hierarchy, exclusion and privilege, but 'place' in this metaphorical sense is criticised in the writing as associated with fixity, disavowal of change and fear of embodied realities.

In *Emma*, Hartfield represents, in the person of Emma as well as Mr Woodhouse, a determined adherence to a traditional vertical social order, a resistance to the new. *Persuasion* not only offers the mocking caricature of Sir Walter Elliot's absurd pretension that he literally embodies an order immune to change, it also represents the heroine's life before she leaves Kellynch as arrested in time due to her refusal of the risky change that marriage to Wentworth would have entailed. Emma moves socially from the paradigmatic values of Hartfield to engage fully with the metonymic structure of Highbury with its horizontal, non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationships based upon the interactive social perspectives of a shared world.

Anne Elliot is initially resistant and negative as to her move to Bath. Despite this reluctance, however, and even before the reunion with Wentworth, she becomes immersed there in more heterogeneous social networks, more energetic and egalitarian modes of social interaction and a cultural environment much closer than the 'sameness' and 'elegance' of Kellynch-hall to the prerequisites of 'good company' as she lists them to Mr Elliot: 'clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation' (pp. 9, 162). According to Paul Langford it is wrong to understand places like Bath nostalgically in terms of an embalmed world of Regency aristocratic glamour. The success of Bath 'was based upon its appeal to the broad mass of the propertied public [. . .] Aristocratic patronage, commercial exploitation, and the new social aspirations of bourgeois England were closely bound up in the new trends.'¹² In *Sanditon*, the heroine is immediately precipitated out of the stasis of her parents' time-resisting rural seclusion into a new society actively embracing rapid change.

To insist upon this recurrent narrative transition from stability to mobility and from hierarchical homogeneity to horizontal heterogeneity is not to claim for Austen a radical, let alone revolutionary, class politics. Indeed, her greatest hostility is directed towards emerging

ideologies of individualism. There is no wholesale rejection of traditional values in her fiction. In particular, earlier forms of sociability, even when ironised, are represented warmly, as in the case of Mrs Jennings in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr Weston in *Emma* and the Musgrove family in *Persuasion*. Austen recognises that this tradition of sociability can be insensitive in its non-admission of private space for the self, but her most hostile critique is of those characters, like Lucy Steele, Mrs Elton and Mr Elliot, who typify the cold-hearted, self-interest of the new force of competitive individualism.

What is radical, both artistically and politically, is the rigorous materialism of Austen's representation of her world and her pervasive critique of idealist modes of thought that inform elitist visions of social order and of self. It is this worldly realist perception that brings about a revision of the perceptible in her writing. In opposition to the ideology of both subjective and competitive individualism, Austen, through the mobility of her heroines, seeks a transition from earlier traditions of sociability towards a modern identity for the self as embodied and social. Self, as represented within Austen's worldly realism, exists as a dynamic part of a continuous, changing social, cultural and material universe. Jacques Rancière claims that around the end of the eighteenth century a classical, vertical, hierarchical order of representation gave way to a new regime of the perceptible that brought into the field of visibility an egalitarian recognition of equality between people, things and biological matter (*Politics of Literature*, p. 26). This new regime of representation foregrounds process, horizontal continuities and inclusive multiplicity. Within British literature, Austen is undoubtedly a practitioner of a radical new mode of representation that has many points in common with Rancière's designation. Her writing brings into visibility the micro horizontal intersections of material, social and psychological forces that comprise macro processes of change.

David Spring is literally correct in pointing out that the naval officers in *Persuasion* are similar, in terms of social class, to other more traditional characters in the story. Yet Austen's representation of the navy undoubtedly does suggest new possibilities of social relations. In *Persuasion*, the navy, like Highbury in *Emma*, acts as a synecdoche for a more inclusive, mutually caring community, ordered horizontally rather than vertically. Moreover, it represents the largeness of actual geographical space as opposed to the enclosed mental provincialism of Kellynch and Uppercross. Mrs Croft enthusiastically lists her travels to Cork, Lisbon, Gibraltar and the West Indies and the officers refer to a whole variety of geographic postings around

the world. The naval characters also represent the horizontal flow of temporal continuity; they both perpetuate and transform the traditional values of sociability. Like Sir John Middleton in *Sense and Sensibility*, the elder Musgroves at the Great House maintain the tradition of open hospitality expected of and enjoyed by the rural squirearchy over generations. The Musgroves ‘were visited by every body, and had more dinner parties, and more callers, more visitors by invitation and by chance, than any other family. They were more completely popular’ (p. 51). When the younger Musgroves and Anne visit Lyme they encounter similar sociability in the ‘kindly hospitable’ invitation they receive to dine with Captain and Mrs Harville. Anne contrasts this genuine pleasure in receiving guests as an act of friendship with the ‘usual style of give-and-take invitations and dinners of formality and display’ (p. 105).

Anne is thinking here of the stilted fashionable form of entertainment preferred by those like her father and elder sister whose invitations are motivated competitively by the desire to impose their entitlement to privilege and admiration on their carefully selected guests. The parties at the Great House lack any such urge to impress or aggrandise, yet there is a significant difference between Mr and Mrs Musgrove’s sociability and that of the Harvilles. As its name implies, the Great House has the amplitude to accommodate large numbers of people without any inconvenience to its owners. By contrast, Anne has a moment of astonishment when she enters the Harvilles’ house to find ‘rooms so small as none but those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many’ (p. 106). This represents a temporal transition beyond the traditional sociability that goes with a generous sense of the dues of inherited position. The sociability practised by the Harvilles is untied from rank: it is informal, reciprocal and egalitarian.

As this suggests, the representation of naval characters in *Persuasion* continues the critique, made in *Emma*, of traditional deference to gentility and birth. In contrast to vertical hierarchy, the navy stands for greater social movement and inclusiveness. The brilliant career of Nelson from relatively humble origins to national hero meant that, in the popular imagination, at least, the navy was perceived as less influenced by patronage and rank than other professions. Sir Walter voices deep offence at the way the navy brings into social visibility those who should remain beneath notice. The navy is ‘the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of’, he complains (p. 21). A writer to *Gentleman’s Magazine* makes a

similar point, deploring the way naval and military officers take precedence over gentlemen. ‘How should we like to see’, the writer asks, ‘the son of a tailor, a stonemason [. . .] rank before a man [who] [. . .] partakes of the blood of the noblest families?’¹³ Sir Walter insists, again just like the correspondent to *Gentleman’s Magazine*, that the term ‘gentleman’ belongs exclusively to ‘a man of property’. Without that inherited connection to land and birth a person can be dismissed as a ‘nobody’, denied even the visibility of physical existence (p. 26). With her deferential prejudice for rank, Lady Russell makes a similarly dismissive judgement of Captain Wentworth, commenting with unwitting irony that he is ‘a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him’, lacking alliances and connections (p. 29).

Anne’s narrative progress integrates her into the world of horizontal, social mobility. In contrast to the frozen immobility of her father’s and sister’s world, Anne embraces reciprocal friendships with the Harvilles, living in reduced circumstances due to Captain Harville’s injury, with Charles Hayter, heir to insignificant property and living upon a curate’s stipend, and with Mrs Smith, an impoverished widow renting what Sir Walter describes as ‘paltry rooms’ in an unfashionable part of Bath (p. 171). Anne’s egalitarian sympathies are demonstrated when she refuses the company of Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter to keep a promised visit to Mrs Smith. In contention with Captain Harville as to the merits of women’s or men’s affections, Anne exclaims passionately, ‘God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures’ (p. 256). The whole sentiment is striking in the inclusivity of respect Anne asserts here. But the term, ‘fellow-creatures’ is especially egalitarian in its evocation of a commonality based upon shared creaturely being in a novel that insists on the physical vulnerability of all bodily life.

Far from extolling the virtues of tradition and stability, in *Persuasion* Austen goes so far as to insist upon the necessity of change for mental and physical well-being. The experience of the naval characters in the text demonstrates that the health of embodied creatures depends upon activity and varied social interaction. Hence the greater restrictions placed upon women are damaging to their physical and mental resilience. Anne fails to recover her vitality after the loss of Wentworth because ‘no aid had been given in change of place [. . .] or in any novelty or enlargement of society’ (p. 30) and when she moves to Uppercross, her ‘spirits improved by change of place and subject’ (p. 50). Later in the story, Wentworth offers sympathy for the suffering of spirit she must have experienced at Lyme, but she

disagrees, 'So much novelty and beauty! I have travelled so little, that every fresh place would be interesting to me' (p. 200). Even her sister Mary's querulous spirits are raised when she experiences change from the routines of the small family circle of Uppercross.

It is Mrs Croft, however, who makes the novel's point most explicitly: 'The only time that I ever really suffered in body or mind, the only time that I ever fancied myself unwell, or had any ideas of danger, was the winter I passed by myself at Deal' (pp. 76–7). By contrast, Wentworth is able to mitigate the suffering he experiences when Anne rejects him by throwing himself into activity and exertion: 'It was a great object with me, at that time, to be at sea, – a very great object. I wanted to be doing something' (p. 70). The implication of all this must be that any small social world, like that of rank, closed off from the horizontal dynamics of change and social heterogeneity, will be stagnant and unhealthy, both physically and mentally.

Austen's representation of the husband and wife relations of Admiral and Mrs Croft offers a radically alternative ideal of marriage to the conservative ideology of separate spheres, and even more so of any hierarchical ordering of the sexes. Not only does Mrs Croft share her husband's dangerous sea-going life, Anne also recognises that Mrs Croft's active interventions into the Admiral's steering of their carriage offers 'no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs' (p. 99). I have suggested that, in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, Austen disassociates the concluding unions from any support for domestic ideology with its emphasis upon privacy, individualism and consumerism. The marriage of the Crofts is equally at odds with the prevailing idealisation of the home as site for displays of taste, wealth and thus individualised identity. Mrs Croft declares she was just as happy in her early, small, draughty home in North Yarmouth as in her present occupancy of the grandeur of Kellynch. Her sociability is enacted as much in the public sphere of Bath as in the domestic interior. Anne sees her constantly with the Admiral greeting friends as they walk about Bath, forming into little knots for eager conversation with 'Mrs Croft looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her' (p. 183). The fact that Anne views this behaviour as 'a most attractive picture of happiness' not only underwrites the warmth of Austen's representation of the Croft marriage but must also suggest that it is the progressive ideal Anne will expect of her own married life.

Critical readings that dissent from a feminist interpretation of Mrs Croft's presence in the text tend to focus upon Wentworth's opposition to his sister as to women's presence on board ship. His

assertion that they have no place at sea due to the fact that they cannot be accommodated with the degree of comfort that as women is their due, suggests he harbours a stereotypical view of women's 'femininity' as demanding protection from physical rigours and hardship (p. 74). This would account for his readiness to condemn Anne's refusal of him as 'weakness and timidity', attributes typically associated with the frailty of a womanly mind and body, indeed, even demanded of women in many conduct books at the time.¹⁴ Wentworth's quarrel with his sister, however, takes place before he has learned to look more searchingly into his own values and behaviour and to recognise the errors in his thinking. The text ironically subjects Wentworth to what can be seen as a stereotypical feminine narrative, a staple of conduct literature, in which wilful, over-confidence in self by a young woman leads to error, a humbling sense of contrition and reformed behaviour.

This ironic plot structure of *Persuasion* is part of a wider examination in the story of what had commonly been deemed opposing masculine and feminine virtues. As with the essentialist myth of a totalised congruent identity deriving from rank, so, too, gender essentialism insists upon the necessary affinity of a womanly or manly identity with forms of feeling, speech and action. In contesting these stereotypes, the novel focuses interrogatively upon qualities like steadfastness, courage, tenderness and compassion. These words recur throughout the text in ways that suggest these emotions are not fixed attributes of gender identity but rather exist in a constant state of flux in both sexes irrespective of imposed boundaries. With his critical perception of Anne's 'weakness' in mind, Wentworth calls for 'fortitude and strength of mind [. . .] decision and firmness' when he speaks with Louisa Musgrove as to her sister's attachment to Charles Hayter (p. 94). Anne seeks to encourage Captain Benwick 'to fortify' his mind against a persistence of tenderness that borders on self-indulgence (p. 109). Unlike Wentworth, Anne is self-ironically aware that her own feelings throw her precepts into question. Wentworth learns that in the case of Louisa, strength of mind and firmness may be flattering terms for stubbornness but he takes longer to bring these accusations against himself in relation to his treatment of Anne.

Steadfastness, tenderness, fortitude and strength of affection are the terms of the debate Anne engages in with Captain Harville that concludes with her assertion of the equality of feeling in all human creatures. This assertion answers Harville's claim that women's sentiments, like their bodies, are more feeble than those of men (p. 253). Anne had earlier voiced her dissent from this stereotypical viewpoint

when Admiral Croft speaks somewhat disparagingly of Captain Benwick's 'soft sort of manner'. In disagreeing with the Admiral, Anne is intent 'to oppose the too-common idea of spirit and gentleness being incompatible with each other' (p. 187). The text as a whole underwrites Anne's position demonstrating that men's and women's feelings and emotions, as fellow creatures, are interchangeable and that gender identity is by no means a bounded and destined opposition. This bold claim for masculine tenderness and female strength, challenging dominant gender ideology, is equally asserted in the text by the compassion and caring shown by the naval personnel to each other in times of trouble.

Again overturning essentialist expectations, it is Anne who is able to react with 'strength and zeal' at the moment of Louisa's accident, while Wentworth is wholly incapacitated, turning desperately to Anne for leadership (p. 119). Later, in Bath when he fears Anne is attached to Mr Elliot he suffers all the imposed passivity and impotency that is more normally the lot of women. 'But to be waiting so long in inaction, and waiting only for evil, had been dreadful' he tells her (pp. 264–5). Until he is sure of Anne's true feelings, Wentworth's behaviour is indecisive, fearful and agitated, all that is opposite of firmness and resolve. His language when he finally declares himself is emotional and exclamatory: 'You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope' (pp. 257–8). From a traditional representational point of view, one would term this feminine discourse and Austen uses the term 'he cried' rather than 'he said' again indicative of over-wrought emotionalism (p. 268).

The reconciliation of Anne and Wentworth at Bath repeats the same reversal of stereotypical attributes of courage and fear exhibited by them both at Lyme. In Bath, as in Lyme, Anne is represented as taking control with firmness and courage, rather similar to Mrs Croft's firm guidance of her husband's driving. In the expectation of meeting Wentworth at the benefit concert in the presence of her family she resolves, 'as to the power of addressing him she felt all over courage' (p. 195). When he appears in the entrance to the concert hall, 'she instantly spoke' and by taking the initiative she gives him courage to stop and talk with her, a reversal of normal gender rules of behaviour (p. 197). In the final episodes representing their reunion, it is Anne who is awarded the attributes that have been so variously investigated in the narrative. Anne 'grew steadfast and fearless in the thankfulness of her enjoyment' (p. 266). It is Anne who dryly points out that Wentworth has been largely the cause of his own unhappiness: 'I should have thought', said Anne, 'that my

manner to yourself might have spared you much or all of this' (p. 266). While Anne insists 'I must believe that I was right', Wentworth not only has to acknowledge the weakness of his long-harboured resentment, he also has to accept the loss of his individualistic belief in his own masculine self-sufficiency.

It is not only through her representation of the navy that Austen challenges the traditional vertical regime of the perceptible with new, more fluid, horizontal ways of seeing social relations and human nature. In Chapter 3, Mr Shepherd, Sir Walter's agent, recommends Admiral Croft as a suitable tenant for Kellynch-hall, reporting that the Admiral would be glad of the hunting rights to the estate. The Admiral, however, seems an indifferent sportsman, having said that 'he sometimes took out a gun, but never killed' (p. 24). In his Introduction to the Oxford edition of the novel, Claude Rawson comments that this sentence has 'an odd eruptive force' disturbing the insipid surface of the lawyer's recital. The word 'kill', especially, 'announces a small sudden violence'.¹⁵ The negative force of Austen's language in this context of guns and shooting is echoed later in Chapter 6 in the comment that 'the Mr Musgroves have their own game to guard, and to destroy' (p. 46). Again the unexpected violence of the word 'destroy' is striking within the calm, quotidian details of life at Uppercross. There is, in fact, a metonymic chain of references to guns and shooting running through the text, many, but by no means all, relating to Charles Musgrove's overriding 'zeal' for the sport (p. 47).

Austen's worldly realism is nowhere more evident than in her awareness of 'things' as foci of identity formations, discursive ideological networks, residual and emergent social relations and forces of production and consumerism. Things in her novels are 'gatherings' in Bruno Latour's sense of material objects as substantially imbued with the dynamic heterogeneity of historical processes.¹⁶ In Jacques Rancière's terms, Austen subtly allows mute things to talk. In *Persuasion* guns point metonymically to transitions within consumerism, technological innovation and masculine identity. Use of guns was also a shaping force within the dynamics of class tensions and solidarities during Austen's lifetime. Additionally, discourses around issues of violence to animals engage with notions of sensibility and what constitutes human nature.

The production of guns was a highly skilled, prestigious craft. In the eighteenth century the main purchasers of quality guns were aristocrats whose propensity for duelling ensured they demanded weapons of the highest possible technical excellence. As duelling became

increasingly discountenanced, the consumerist enthusiasm for fine guns shifted into a new passion for shooting as sport. Masculinity was no longer tied up with notions of honour, but with more rugged images of prowess on the sporting field. The invention of 'flying shooting', that is aiming at birds on the wing, demanded the technical innovation of fast firing mechanisms. The era during which Austen was writing brought to the fore a constellation of brilliant gunsmiths whose weapons have been likened to Rolls-Royces in their desirability, mechanical brilliance and cost.¹⁷ William Lesley Richards opened his gun production enterprise in 1812, Thomas Boss also began in 1812 and James Purdey in 1814.

The competitive innovation among such elite gunmakers was intense and led to rapid improvement in gun technology, including the quicker firing mechanism of the two barrelled gun. In *Persuasion*, Charles Musgrove, as a connoisseur of fine guns, has an appointment with a gunmaker in Bath who has 'promised me the sight of a capital gun he is just going to send off [. . .] By his description, a good deal like the second-sized double-barrel of mine' (p. 261). It may seem surprising that Austen is so obviously well-informed about current improvements to gun manufacture, but, like Woolf, she is acutely aware of the ramifying material implications of technological innovation, whether of fireplaces, pianos or guns. According to historian, R. K. Webb, a true sporting enthusiast, such as Charles is certainly represented to be, 'devoted an enormous proportion of his income to keep up the apparatus of sport'.¹⁸ The novel certainly suggests, negatively, that Charles's pursuit of this 'manly' outdoor activity involves excessive expenditure of his time and energies regardless of financial extravagance (p. 47).

The technological improvements to guns, brought about by consumer demand like that of Charles Musgrove, made possible a new pattern of leisure for land-owning men, the rituals of shooting as sport. In turn, this popular activity became central to a class-specific constitution of masculinity. Guns and shooting, therefore, interlink with the text's interrogation of gender essentialism that attributes fearlessness to men and timidity to women. In contrast to Charles's obsession with guns (he only visits Bath because the shooting season is over and he has nothing to do), others of the younger generation of men decline opportunities to shoot. Charles is critical and disappointed that although his cousin, Charles Hayter, has been preferred to a living 'in the centre of some of the best preserves in the kingdom [. . .] he will [not] value it as he ought [. . .] Charles is too cool about sporting. That's the worst of him' (p. 236). Captain Benwick

also turns down Charles's invitation to shoot at Uppercross, saying that 'he never shot' (p. 141). This indifference to manly sport clearly causes unease, and Charles's misgivings about Captain Benwick are put to rest only when he joins in a morning of rat-hunting. 'He played his part so well', Charles says, 'that I have liked him the better ever since' (p. 237). Charles calls Benwick a 'brave fellow' for the way he acquits himself killing rats. Bravery, for men like Charles Musgrove, is essentially associated with the ability and willingness to kill. By contrast, Anne Elliot insists that spirit and tenderness are compatible.

The new passion for shooting also had a significant determining effect upon class relations during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, as well as upon the physical shape of the countryside. Although game preservation went back to the eighteenth century, it only became rigorous and widespread in the early nineteenth century. F. M. L. Thompson notes that the spread of root-crop husbandry and the cultivation of grain crops 'provided a farming environment increasingly palatable to the pheasant and partridge'.¹⁹ The enclosure and consolidation of estates was in part motivated by a desire to make preservation more feasible and policeable. In *Persuasion*, Charles Musgrove refers admiringly to game preserves 'surrounded by three great proprietors, each more careful and jealous than the other' (p. 236). Charles speaks here as a future landed proprietor himself with his own game to 'guard and destroy'. F. M. L. Thompson claims that preservation rights were a means of consolidating political relations between landowners and the higher gentry, those comprising the magistrate class, by means of invitations to shoot on their land (*English Landed Society*, p. 140). Charles Musgrove is certainly generous with his invitations to Captains Wentworth and Benwick to join him in sporting activity.

The more serious impact of game preservation and especially of the laws that protected those rights, however, was to exacerbate class tensions between landowners and the unlanded classes, even those with a claim to be classed among the gentry. According to Paul Langford, 'the game laws, condemned even by Blackstone, offended many of middling status, not least the tenant farmers who found themselves potential law-breakers on their own farms'.²⁰ Historian Richard Price sees the game laws as a 'flash-point for social relations'.²¹ The game laws, confirming hunting rights for those owning land, went back to 1671, but during the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century the penalties and the rigorous pursuit of transgression became ever more draconian. Known as the Black Acts, the game

laws made poaching a transportable offence, thereby prohibiting the rural poor from supplementing their scanty diets with the odd rabbit or hare. This exacerbation of hardship became even more contentious during periods of acute distress in rural areas, as after the failed harvest of 1815. Tenant farmers, like the Reverend Austen, were legally prevented from protecting their crops from the depredations of game birds and rabbits. As the laws were made progressively more severe, even to be caught carrying a gun after dark became a capital offence. The right and willingness to kill were rigorously maintained class entitlements. The game laws were not reformed until 1830 but during Austen's time there was vociferous debate on the subject both in Parliament and the media.

In his detailed account of the Black Acts in *Whigs and Hunters*, E. P. Thompson cites a prosecution in 1814 when an Essex labourer, William Potter, was executed under the game laws for cutting down the orchard of a neighbouring miller.²² The savage sentencing caused 'surprise' even to the magistrate involved. It may, perhaps, have been in response to this extreme penalty that a correspondent to *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1815, informed readers that legal punishments for robbery of fruit in an orchard include 'fines, imprisonment, whipping and the pillory' but, contrary to general opinion, 'orchard trespass [is] *not* covered by the severity of the Game Laws'.²³ A property owner, the writer continues, is therefore not justified in shooting and killing anyone seen at night trespassing in his garden orchard to steal fruit. These details provide an informative context for the complaint made in *Persuasion* by Mr Shepherd against Mr Wentworth, the curate at Monkford, who refused to prosecute a 'farmer's man [caught] breaking into his orchard – wall torn down – apples stolen' (p. 25). Mr Shepherd finds this leniency in applying the law very odd, but it would seem that subtly throughout the text Austen disassociates a significant section of the younger generation from the legal, class and gender ideology inhering in the material substance and practice of guns and killing.²⁴ By this means, Austen looks progressively to a future society ordered by more compassionate values and fellow-feeling.

She was not alone in this. Growing public opposition to the game laws was not only due to concern over exacerbation of class conflict in the post-revolutionary era. Criticism of harsh legal punishments was part of a much wider shift in public sentiment towards a more humanitarian concern for all forms of creaturely life. This movement gave rise to any number of poetic effusions lamenting the loss of a favourite cat and even the inadvertent death of worms and flies.

Nevertheless, the humanitarian movement for greater compassion and respect for all physical creatures had influential and eloquent support in public figures like William Wilberforce and William Cowper, one of Austen's favoured poets. Cowper wrote movingly about hares he had saved from the hunt and kept as pets. In *Animal Rights, Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800*, Hilda Kean suggests that by the nineteenth century 'the way in which people treated animals became a distinguishing feature of being humane'.²⁵ Heated and polarised debates within Parliament during attempts to enact legislation for animal welfare kept the topic very much alive within the public sphere during the early decades of the nineteenth century, resulting in the establishment of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824.²⁶ Within this context of heightened awareness, the violence of Austen's verbs 'kill' and 'destroy', rather than the more obvious and neutral 'shoot', seems very likely to be judgemental.

Evangelical critics of animal cruelty, like Wilberforce, drew analogies with the cruelties inflicted upon human sufferers of the slave trade.²⁷ This comparison points to a radical shift under way in the conception of human life. Instead of the vertical privileging of human beings as different in kind from other living creatures on account of the possession of divine souls and rational minds, horizontal continuities were increasingly recognised across human and animal life. This constitutes a movement towards empirical ways of understanding human nature as opposed to religious idealism. It was not, however, a rejection of divinity but rather a continuation of David Hartley's religiously inflected materialism in which physical life is understood as integral to God's benign moral order.

It is within this mode of thinking that a writer to *Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1814, makes the argument for humane treatment of animals in terms of both empirical observation and of shared creaturely life. 'Creature' was, indeed, the preferred term within this new humane discourse. Notably, too, the reviewer's claims rest upon a dynamic sense of the indivisibility of physical and mental being:

Conscious, however, of being endowed with perpetual sensibility and thought, and not less so that the ordinary movements of our bodies are no other than the immediate result of our mental perceptions and volitions, it becomes morally impossible for us, when we observe in the motions of other creatures phenomena precisely similar to those which are exhibited in the voluntary movements of our own limbs, not to ascribe to those creatures [. . .] the possession of a nature at least equally sentient and self-directive with that of man.²⁸

In a similar vein, the *Monthly Review*, in 1815, carried an account of Joseph Alphonse's *An Essay on the Spirit of the Education of the Human Race* which again demonstrated a belief in the shared nature of all living things. As well as encompassing the whole 'human race', the book includes a chapter on the education of domestic animals. The reviewer writes approvingly that Alphonse successfully shows how animals' minds and intellects, like those of humans, are greatly invigorated when they 'endeavour to understand hints rather than blows'.²⁹

While certainly understood within a religious framework, recognition of continuities between human and animal nature and consciousness, based upon empirical observation, is, nevertheless, implicitly anti-idealist. The vertical regime of mind over matter is replaced by a more horizontal recognition of the body-mind continuum and of the continuities of physical life shared by all creatures. A similar inclusive view of reality underpins Austen's critique of the human propensity to construct closed mental realms at the expense of broader worldly perspectives. Throughout her fiction, over-reliance on their own subjective constructions leads characters into folly, confusion and error as they mistake what they desire for what is. In *Persuasion*, it is not only Sir Walter Elliot who inhabits a solipsistic looking-glass world of self-delusion, although he is undoubtedly the most extreme case. As Anne moves from Kellynch to Uppercross and then from Uppercross back to Lady Russell's home at Kellynch she is, each time, quickly 'sensible of some mental change'; each small world is largely the product of the inhabitants' own minds (p. 134). 'Every little social commonwealth', Anne realises, has 'its own matters of discourse' (p. 46). In language reminiscent of Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Anne recognises that experience of different mental worlds offers a valuable sense of 'our own nothingness' (p. 45).³⁰ This lack of self-centredness facilitates the capacity to move horizontally across the different perspectives of fellow creatures to become what Smith calls the impartial observer. It is this fluidity of consciousness that underpins a communal attainment of justice, equality and compassion. Throughout the narrative, Anne, like Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* and Emma more painfully, demonstrates this capacity to share the consciousness of others, recognising it to be 'highly incumbent on her to clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas' in the world she currently inhabits (p. 46).

Anne says sombrely, 'What wild imaginations one forms, where dear self is concerned! How sure to be mistaken!' (p. 218). This is the anti-idealist teaching of all of Austen's novels. In particular, belief

in their own rationality frequently blinds characters to the actual desires driving their behaviour. It is unclear whether Austen herself had indicated the choice of *Persuasion* as the title for the novel but it is certainly appropriate. Some of the finest comic scenes are those where characters earnestly seek to persuade others of the absolute rightness of their mental perspectives. Thus Mary seeks Anne's help in persuading Charles that she really is in ill-health, the various Musgroves also turn to Anne with their views on Mary's handling of her children and her servants, while Mary is equally certain of the errors committed by the Musgroves. Self-persuasion is also treated comically as when Mary convinces herself that her nerves are too fraught for her to stay at home with her sick child or when Henrietta Musgrove rehearses to Anne the good reasons why Dr Shirley should give up his parish duties to enjoy well-deserved retirement. This would, of course, leave a vacancy for Charles Haytor (pp. 61, 110). Apart from Anne, none of these persons is able to enter into the subjective perspectives of the others or recognise their own mixed motivations. Lady Russell complains of the noise made by the children at Uppercross, but the cacophony of traffic as they enter Bath raises her spirits (p. 146). 'How quick come the reasons for approving what we like!' comments the narrator earlier of Lady Russell's arguments in favour of Bath (p. 17).

David Hume initiated this scandalous dethronement of rationality when he declared that reason is always the slave of the passions. A similar willingness to displace reason as the defining attribute of humanness and morality informs Austen's radical revision of both emergent ideologies of self: the competitive, acquisitive self and the self of interior sensibility. Instead of interiority, Austen gives perceptibility to physical energies and feelings. The retrospective view of the 'age of reason', read through Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and its nineteenth-century proselytisers (and by current, selective neo-liberal emphasis on Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*), tends to identify competitive self-interest entirely with rationality. The only course of action for wholly reasonable individuals, according to utilitarian and neo-liberal thinking, is that which preserves and enhances the well-being of self.

Austen might seem to subscribe to this view of self-interest as directed solely by rational choice. In *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, those characters like Fanny Dashwood, whose behaviour and motivation are entirely selfish, are almost invariably described as cold-hearted, dominated by sense rather than sensibility. But the opposition between sense and sensibility in Austen is very far from

being an opposition between selfishness and benevolence. Characters exhibiting either an excess of self-interest or of sensibility are equally represented by Austen as driven by what Elizabeth Hamilton termed the compulsion to enlarge the factitious idea of self.³¹ This can take the form of competitive greed, as with Fanny Dashwood, the desire to possess as much of the world as possible. Alternatively, the self can be empowered and enlarged by imposing its subjective desires upon the external world, as is the case with Marianne Dashwood, Emma and Sir Walter.

In most of her novels, Austen's representation of characters dominated by competitive self-interest is striking in the physical sense she conveys, especially in their speech, of rapacious embodied energies, very different from rational calculation. Fanny Dashwood, Lucy Steele, Mrs Norris and Mrs Elton seem wholly compelled by the hungry passions of self. With Mr Elliot in *Persuasion*, however, Austen appears to move into new psychological and social territory. If earlier representations reveal the passions driving rational self-interest, in Mr Elliot Austen explores the more dangerous force of systematised rationality. There is absolutely no indication of outlandish energy or excess in the representation of his urbane demeanour that gains the approval even of Sir Walter. Indeed the only fault that Anne Elliot can find in him is an absence of strong feeling. His manner is polished, easy, agreeable: 'There could be no doubt of his being a sensible man [. . .] His tone, his expressions, his choice of subject, his knowing where to stop, – it was all the operation of a sensible, discerning mind' (p. 155).

Nothing in Mr Elliot's speech or behaviour hints that his only guiding principle is total selfishness. It is Mrs Smith who reveals the chilling and comprehensive nature of his self-interest. Mr Elliot, she says, 'is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery [. . .] he has no feeling for others [. . .] he is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion' (p. 215). This must be one of the most damning verdicts against a character in all of Austen's novels. It is, of course, the judgement made by another character with just cause for resentment. Nevertheless Anne Elliot underwrites this view of Mr Elliot, concluding, 'It was a dreadful picture of ingratitude and inhumanity' (p. 227).

The problem for many readers of *Persuasion* is that this 'dreadful picture' is not conveyed with the dramatic immediacy and vivacity that almost everywhere typifies Austen's representation of character.

The device of Mrs Smith's detailed revelations seems clumsy, a means of resolving the narrative rather than an integrated element of the fictional dynamics. One cause of this problem may be the difficulty of the task Austen set herself in her innovative perception of what we may now call the 'banality of evil'. Mr Elliot, like many calculating and callous people, is only unnatural in his lack of singularity. Lady Russell warms to him because he never defies public opinion and is never run away with by spirits (p. 159). Anne condemns him on the same grounds: 'There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight' (p. 175). Such a character presents a difficult challenge for representation. Mr Elliot is pleasantly unexceptionable to everyone with whom he wishes to be on politely sociable terms: 'he pleased them all' (p. 175).

There is no suggestion in the text that he knows himself in any different aspect from that of outward civility or that he is driven by hidden passions. It is perhaps the normality of Mr Elliot in his ruthless pursuit of self-interest that is Austen's point. By the early nineteenth century, self-interest was being hailed not only as a rational virtue in individuals, it was also being extolled as the morally beneficent driving force of national prosperity. Competitive individualism was becoming a totalising system of belief ordering perceptions of reality. It is this consensual normalisation of selfishness that the representation of Mr Elliot points to and is made chillingly explicit in Mrs Smith's explanation, 'I must own I saw nothing reprehensible in what Mr Elliot was doing. "To do what is best for himself," passed as a duty' (p. 218). When a specific vice becomes reconceptualised throughout society as unexceptionable behaviour, even as a duty, it becomes difficult to satirise.

To suggest that, in addition to attacking competitive individualism, Austen also undermines the ideal of subjective individualism is, perhaps, more contentious. This is especially so in the case of Anne Elliot. She is often seen as the most subjective of Austen's heroines and as marking a shift in Austen's psychological representation away from ironic treatment of romantic sensibility to endorsement of it. The heroine's emotional identification with seasonal change, the 'tender and underisive' treatment of her love for Wentworth, and the extensive use of free indirect discourse throughout the narrative, it is argued, all indicate increased influence of romantic subjectivity upon Austen's artistic practice.³² Not all critics agree with this assessment. William Galperin claims that while 'the final ending of *Persuasion* nicely justifies the novel's designation as the most subjective of Austen's texts' and while 'the focus on Anne's interiority at the

novel's close necessarily accords with the ideology of individualism', the narrator's perspective subtly disassociates itself from that of the heroine.³³ John Wiltshire also recognises an increased emphasis on interiority in *Persuasion*, but rejects a romantic Austen. He argues that the novel 'depicts Anne Elliot attempting to live the life of the Christian stoic. She feels deeply, but she seeks means, through the exertion of "reason", to combat her feelings' (*Jane Austen and the Body*, p. 175).

Wiltshire sees the transparency with which Austen presents invasions of feeling in *Persuasion* as an artistic achievement, allowing her to represent the heroine's struggle for rational control over emotion, in other words, as a reassertion of the mind-body hierarchy. There is an important distinction to be made here. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne learns to submit her subjective views of the world to the external evidence of empirical reality. This is very different from disciplining self to submit to a religious or spiritual moral system such as Christian stoicism. To read *Persuasion* as either an endorsement of romantic sensibility, the ideology of individualism, as Galperin terms it, or, alternatively, to read it as advocacy of an abstract principle of self-discipline would necessarily imply a radical rejection by Austen of her earlier critique of the cult of subjective individualism. Both stoic rationalism and romantic subjectivity look inward, stressing an ideal of interiority. In so doing, they augment an idea of self dominant in the classical regime of representation structured vertically by the mind-matter hierarchy. It is a regime that demotes from notice embodied social being and diminishes the self's interaction with the world it inhabits.

Austen's worldly realism, by contrast, represents self as a dynamic continuum of social, emotional, rational and physical energies. Deriving from the empirical psychology of Hume and Hartley, this new perception of the self is brought into fullest visibility in *Persuasion*, especially in the representation of Anne Elliot. It is this extended view of self, challenging the separation of reason from feeling and mind from matter that propels Austen's most innovative writing practice. In *Persuasion*, even more than in earlier novels, she emphasises the entangled inseparability of emotional, social and intellectual responses. This emphasis is marked throughout the text by recourse to near oxymorons as when Anne leaves Kellynch-hall 'in a sort of desolate tranquillity' or when Lady Russell listens to news of Wentworth's probable attachment to Louisa 'in angry pleasure, in pleased contempt' (pp. 38, 135). Moreover, the artistic transparency with which Anne's feelings and responses are depicted

functions ironically to undercut stoic moral pretensions rather than illustrate them. Anne's reasoning is at fault at least as often as her feelings, and usually it is near impossible to disentangle the rational from the emotional. Until very near the end of the story Anne, like so many Austen heroines, is the victim of her own mistaken self-persuasion. Like Emma, her mind is sometimes more faulty than her embodied feelings.

The language used to describe Anne's relinquishment of Wentworth – the decision that propels the whole narrative – foregrounds the treacherous slipperiness with which rational, social and emotional feelings intertwine. The double epistemological uncertainty of the verbs 'persuade' and 'believe' subtly suggests that when 'she was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing' this is very far from a rational acceptance by Anne of any material or moral grounds for that judgement (p. 30). This ambivalence is reinforced by the shaky implications of the verb 'imagined' to depict Anne's self-persuasion that she is consulting Wentworth's own good in ending the affair. And the repetition of 'belief' as the term for her thought that she puts Wentworth before her self inserts a further implicit questioning of the status of that 'belief' which forms 'her chief consolation'. The near impossibility of teasing out the impulses of emotional and social pressures from those of rational thought in this passage is compounded by the irresolvable uncertainty of where narrative discourse flows into free indirect discourse.

Throughout most of the narrative, the representation of Anne's responses dramatises a similar confused interflow of reasoning with emotion, emotion depicted as wholly embodied. In many cases, as with the initial refusal of Wentworth, the attempt at rationalising seems driven by the need for consolation or avoidance of pain rather than a stoic acceptance of truth. Indeed, Anne's and Wentworth's conflicting feelings need to be related to the novel's investigation of emotions like timidity, prudence, fearfulness and their opposites. Thus, after meeting Wentworth again for the first time after their separation, Anne 'began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less' (p. 64). She represents to herself the absurdity of 'resuming the agitation' after an interval of eight years. Yet almost instantly she falls into wondering what his feelings had been on seeing her again, jumping to the enticing thought that his being there does not suggest he wishes to avoid her. The next moment she is 'hating herself for the folly which asked the question' implying as it does a wishfulness on her part that would leave her open to further hurt (p. 65).

Much later, when she is in Bath and expecting another imminent reunion with Wentworth she is still attempting to scold herself back to reason. Nevertheless, she gives way to 'a great inclination' to look out into the street to see if it rained, arguing with herself, 'Why was she to suspect herself of another motive? [. . .] one half of her should not be always so much wiser than the other half, or always suspecting the other of being worse than it was' (p. 190). This passage comically belies any possibility of wholly rational self-knowledge. The idealist identification of moral rectitude with the struggle for rational understanding and discipline of baser desires was to become the driving force of plot structure in much subsequent Victorian psychological realism. In contrast, what *Persuasion* does so brilliantly is dramatise the dynamic, self-persuasive, tangled powers of imagination, emotion and reason in simultaneously masking and pursuing desire. The congruence of classical verisimilitude is wholly undone.

In addition to challenging any privileging of abstract reason, Austen's writing foregrounds the dominance of the physical and social worlds in the constitution of self. It is not a stoic attempt at self-control that the representation of Anne suggests, in the early part of the novel, but physical depression. Anne has lost 'bloom' and the word precisely evokes the glow and flourishing that derive from the vitality of the whole embodied being. Anne is first described in the text as 'nobody' and the literalness of this epithet, lacking bodily existence, is driven home by her unacknowledged physical presence in the early episodes of the novel. Her very first comment comes as a small shock to the reader, so unnoticed has her presence been in the text. She speaks only three sentences in the first three chapters, her words having 'no weight' with her family. She is indeed a non-entity, effectually rendered invisible and mute. The telling contrast is with Mrs Croft, who 'had a squareness, uprightness, and vigour of form, which gave importance to her person' (p. 52). Here, again, Austen's language insists upon a sense of the indivisibility of physical, psychological and social identity.

Embodied identity cannot be derived from subjective introspection. A sense of bodily presence and social worth are constituted only in and by the regard of others, as Adam Smith had taught. Anne, it is made clear, has lacked the recognition from others that produces, in a fundamental sense, self-possession. Although a skilled piano player, 'she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to' (p. 50). Similarly, her attention to the needs of others brings no sense of self-worth through their expressions of recognition and gratitude.

Her sister declares that ‘nobody will want her’ during their removal to Bath and her other sister, Mary, confirms this negative judgement of Anne’s uselessness: ‘Dear me! What can *you* possibly have to do?’ (pp. 36, 41). Anne’s narrative trajectory, therefore, not only challenges gender hierarchy, it also enacts the injurious bodily and mental effects of social invisibility as enforced by vertical, discriminatory regimes of the perceptible.

Anne’s acquirement of visible embodied self-possession is mediated by physical interaction and eye contact with others. The transition from nobody to somebody is traced as acknowledgement of her embodied visibility. When Wentworth arrives at Uppercross Cottage, Anne only half meets his eye (p. 64). Thereafter they avoid direct engagement with each other. This physical and social alienation is breached by the intimacy of touch. Wentworth releases Anne from her nephew by unfastening the ‘sturdy little hands [. . .] from around her neck’ (p. 86). The sturdiness of the child’s hands draws attention to the act of physical touching involved. Shortly after this, Wentworth again comes to Anne’s aid in a directly physical act when he lifts her into his sister’s carriage. Once more Austen’s language foregrounds Anne’s awareness of bodily contact: ‘Yes, – he had done it [. . .] his will and his hands had done it’ (p. 98).

Apart from touch, the most powerful form of direct interaction with others is that of eye contact. Intersubjective perspective constitutes the shared world. Those denied notice are denied community. There is justified criticism of women’s subjection to the male gaze and a similar objection could be brought against Austen’s depiction of Anne Elliot as the subject of male admiration. This seems an unduly negative reading in the context of Austen’s concern with the embodied self which is produced only through the recognition and approval of others. The description of Anne’s appearance as admired by Mr Elliot focuses upon her renewed physical vitality, her ‘bloom’, ‘freshness’ and ‘animation’, rather than upon any stereotypical feminine attributes. The text makes clear that Anne knows she is admired and recognises this with pleasure, not with the inhibited modesty prescribed for young women. Moreover, the incident provides Anne with a double affirmation of her visible, embodied presence. She is alive to Wentworth’s recognition of the admiration she is receiving, resulting in a moment of conscious eye contact between them, ‘a glance of brightness’ on Wentworth’s part (p. 112). This phrase superbly evokes the continuity of physical and emotional energies. Anne’s sense of self-worth continues to find reassurance in the affirmation she receives from Mr Elliot’s notice at Lyme. When Lady

Russell, too, compliments her on her improved looks, she connects this ‘with the silent admiration of her cousin [. . .] hoping she was to be blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty’ (p. 134). Anne is amused at her own susceptibility to Mr Elliot’s approving gaze, but her growing acceptance of her bodily person as respected and admired by others is marked by her easy willingness to believe herself the object of Captain Benwick’s affections, a striking reversal of her earlier invisibility (p. 145).

Alongside embodied self-possession, Anne acquires the recognition and approval of others necessary for full perceptibility as a social being. The negative ‘What can *you* possibly have to do?’ of the early chapters is ironically transformed across the narrative to a general appreciative recognition of her strength and support in all contingencies. At Lyme, when Louisa lies unconscious, her brother Charles turns instinctively to Anne, crying, ‘what is to be done next?’ and shortly afterwards Wentworth is declaring, ‘none so proper, so capable as Anne!’ (pp. 120, 123). By the time she comes to leave the Musgroves, her departure was ‘an event they all dreaded. “What would they do without her?”’ (p. 132). In the final part of the story, Anne is so far from being a nobody that she is ‘claimed as part of the family’, part of a perceptible community (p. 239).

Austen’s representation of Anne Elliot’s achievement of visible, embodied self-possession, therefore, is not informed by the ideologies of either stoic or religious disciplinary conceptions of self and neither is it derived from romantic privileging of subjectivity. Rather it is informed by Austen’s worldly, materialist understanding of the inseparability of physical, social and mental being, a perception she derives from eighteenth-century psychology. Roy Porter suggests that David Hume’s early episode of self-monitored sickness convinced him that ‘thinking could not divorce itself from sensation, and sensation was rooted in the senses, in the body’.³⁴ In *David Hartley on Human Nature*, Richard Allen argues that for Hartley, ideas ‘are not simply the responses of the disembodied mind [. . .] rather they are the meanings an embodied, active, and speaking being develops through interaction with its social and physical environment’.³⁵ ‘The continuing processes of sensation, perception, feeling, action, and thought, understood both physically and subjective, *are* the mind’ for Hartley, Allen claims (p. 189). This could stand as a description of Austen’s representation of consciousness as inherently physical as well as mental.

In *Persuasion*, Austen drives home her radical sense of the physicality of human life by the startling recurrence of accidents, illnesses

and mortality suffered by so many characters. Creaturely being, the text implicitly claims, subsists in the fleshly life common to all. Mental well-being is shown to be dependent upon healthy physical activity. The innovative originality of Austen's worldly realism derives from the regime of visibility she brings to the physical basis of human subjectivity and social relations, and to the cultural force of the world of things. Typically, the Elliot family's pursuit of status is depicted by means of Mary's obsession with who takes precedence in walking into rooms; social privilege has to be literally performed in physical space by the physical body. For Sir Walter, bodily appearance is visible manifestation of inherent social superiority, carried in the aristocracy of blood. Moreover, Austen's language in *Persuasion* utilises strikingly physical and concrete phrases to evoke the embodied aspect of responses and emotions. Anne thinks of the rooms and groves of Kellynch as 'beginning to own other eyes and other limbs' and on leaving Uppercross she looks back at 'some breathings of friendship and reconciliation' with Wentworth (pp. 51, 133).

For materialists, like Hartley, all subsequent emotions and desires derive from the earliest physical experiences of pleasure and pain in infancy. Whereas idealist notions of sensibility are commonly associated with spiritual sensitivity and mental refinement, Austen's language insistently locates emotion in bodily sensation. It is, indeed, rare to find accounts of inner response that are not described physically. Her writing, thus, brings interiority into the realm of the perceptible, relocated from individualised privacy to a shared creaturely world. When Wentworth assists Anne into the Crofts' carriage, she experiences 'emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed' (p. 98). Mrs Croft's declaration in favour of short engagements sends a 'nervous thrill all over her' (p. 251). Rather than refined sensibility, Austen's writing foregrounds the physical violence involved in processes of feeling. Anne's experience on seeing Wentworth again in Bath is 'overpowering, blinding, bewildering [. . .] It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery' (p. 191). The word 'agitation' occurs again and again in the text to express the inseparability of the physical and the emotional. The bodily intensity of inner feeling is registered in powerful physical language, as in 'a gnawing solicitude never appeased', 'breath too much oppressed' and eyes that 'devoured' the words of Wentworth's confessional letter (pp. 247, 256, 257).

The perception of emotional and mental life, as embedded in and deriving from the physical world, forms the basis of Austen's strikingly innovative depiction of consciousness in *Persuasion*. Austen

expands the field of the perceptible, representing consciousness not as a hidden personal possession, denoting individual moral worth, but as much fuller and more astonishing than such traditional idealist conceptions. Consciousness, in *Persuasion*, is simultaneous comprehension of and response to a single moment alive with multiple forces: social interaction, physical location, cultural implications and a flux of bodily and emotional sensations. When Captain Wentworth presents himself for the first time at Uppercross Cottage, the electric rush of Anne's heightened awareness is caught in the rapidity of Austen's syntax and use of hyphens and repetitions. In the same instant, Anne hears Wentworth's voice, judges the propriety of what he says to those present, all within the confusing physical swirl of a room full of persons and voices (p. 64).

This radical new recognition of the speed and fullness with which consciousness comprehends a moment of psycho-social and physical reality is even more intensely realised in the representation of the meeting between Anne and Wentworth as they attend a concert. Anne simultaneously registers the noises in the room, 'the almost ceaseless slam of the door, and ceaseless buzz of persons walking through', is acutely tuned in to every word Wentworth utters, flooded with a rush of intense, confused emotions and aware of bodily sensation, of 'beginning to breathe very quick' (p. 199). Such dynamic worldly realism pushes open the boundaries of how we perceive the motility of self in its continuities with the flux of socio-physical reality. Within Austen's fiction, human existence is that of embodied, sentient creatures sharing consciousness of the common socio-physical world. Her writing, therefore, constitutes a total rejection of the idealist hierarchy elevating mind over material being and inaugurates a new egalitarian representative order in which everything can be visible and audible. This democratic shift in the perceptible brings into being a writing practice that looks directly towards Virginia Woolf's artistic materialism.

Notes

1. Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, p. 3.
2. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, p. 153.
3. David Monaghan, *Jane Austen, Structure and Social Vision*, p. 162.
4. Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p. 172.
5. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*, pp. 224, 234; Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 216.

6. Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*, p. 183.
7. David Spring, 'Interpretations of Jane Austen's Social World: Literary Critics and Historians', in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen: New Perspectives, Women and Literature*, pp. 53–72.
8. John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*, p. 159.
9. Robert Clark and Gerry Dutton, 'Agriculture', in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context*, pp. 191, 192.
10. Nicholas Roe, 'Politics', in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context*, p. 361.
11. For a discussion of Burke, landowning and Austen, see Chris Jones, 'Landownership', in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context*, pp. 269–77.
12. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783*, p. 105.
13. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1810, vol. 80, p. 14.
14. Hannah More, in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, insists that the greater 'delicacy of their sex' necessitates a more restricted upbringing for girls than for boys, 1.6.
15. Claude Rawson, 'Introduction' *Persuasion*, p. xix.
16. Bruno Latour, 'Why has Critique Run Out of Steam: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', in Bill Brown, ed., *Things*, p. 170.
17. For information on early field gun production in Britain I am indebted to Douglas Tate, 'British Gunmakers', *The Field*, 3 April 2012.
18. R. K. Webb, *Modern England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, pp. 371–2.
19. F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 137.
20. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial people: England 1727–1783*, p. 301.
21. Richard Price, *British Society 1680–1880*, p. 319.
22. E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act*, p. 255.
23. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1815, vol. 85, p. 398.
24. Wentworth, who does go shooting with Charles Musgrove, is the striking exception among the younger generation. Possibly Austen was reluctant to jeopardise or even politicise the manly status of her hero, given the contentious nature of debates around masculinity, game laws and animal welfare at the time.
25. Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights, Political and Social Change in Britain since 1800*, p. 24.
26. Kathryn Shevelov, *For the Love of Animals: The Rise of the Animal Protection Movement*, provides a very detailed account of the long struggle in and out of Parliament to gain protective legislation for animals.
27. *For the Love of Animals*, pp. 228–30.

28. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1814, vol. 84, p. 109.
29. *Monthly Review*, 1815, vol. 76, pp. 500–1.
30. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, argues for a recognition that 'we are but one of the multitude, in no respect better than any other in it', p. 158.
31. Elizabeth Hamilton, *Series of Popular Lectures*, 1.272.
32. Claude Rawson, 'Introduction' to *Persuasion*, p. vii.
33. William Galperin, *The Historical Austen*, p. 235.
34. Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason*, p. 327.
35. Richard C. Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature*, p. 144.