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REPRESENTATION
AS ENARGEIA II

Nature’s Transcendence of the Natural Sign
Ah! Then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,  
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,  
The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.  

William Wordsworth, "Elegiac Stanzas"

One of the most explicit appeals to enargeia among the ancients occurs in On the Sublime, the treatise attributed to Longinus. Because his use of this term can also lead in another direction, I have postponed dealing with it until this chapter. When we first meet Longinus's version of enargeia at the start of chapter 15, it is given its familiar characteristics and is expressed in the language conventionally reserved for it. Since chapter 8 Longinus has been dealing with the principal sources of the sublime, and of these he now is turning to "images," an appropriate term for the visual appeal of the figure the ancient rhetoricians called enargeia. Longinus's definition of "image" is to the point: "At the present day the word is predominantly used in cases where, carried away by enthusiasm and passion, you think you see what you describe, and you place it before the eyes of your hearers." After quoting two examples from Euripides, he comments, "In these scenes the poet himself saw Furies ["Yon maidens gory-eyed and snaky-haired"], and the image in his mind he almost compelled his audience also to behold." From this statement there might appear to be nothing unusual in this description of the successful operation of enargeia. But since it is the Furies—mythical rather than real creatures—that are being described, Longinus is carrying us beyond the realm of the sensible description typically expected in enargeia. This extension, further modified by the emphasis Longinus places, in his initial definition of "image," on being "carried away by enthusiasm and passion," suggests that he is thinking of a far different sort of enargeia indeed. His language ("you think you see what you describe, and you place it before the eyes of your hearers") seems familiar enough, but the fantastic object of description and the dependence on emotional intensity will produce a conflict between the

1. My quotations are from the commonly used translation by W. Rhys Roberts (1899). Since the chapters are brief, quotations should easily be found by reference to chapter numbers only.
mimetic objective of that language and the affective uses to which it is being put.

The conventional sense of *enargeia*, already strained by this introduction of the "image" of the Furies, is utterly transformed in the comments that follow a number of additional examples Longinus later quotes, even though it still seems to be *enargeia* that is being invoked. Hence I have designated the conventional sense of the word, which I discussed at length in Chapter 3, as *enargeia I* and turn now to what I will term *enargeia II*. I have noted the intrusion of Longinus's special interest in the role of "enthusiasm and passion" even into the vividness he attributed to *enargeia* (still being described as if it were *enargeia I*) in his first quotations. In the subsequent quotations the sense of the writer's being thus "carried away" leads Longinus explicitly to shift our attention from the reader's or hearer's vivid mental perception of what is being described to the writer's vicarious participation in it: "Would you not say that the soul of the writer enters the chariot at the same moment as Phaeton and shares in his dangers and in the rapid flight of his steeds? For it could never have conceived such a picture had it not been borne in no less swift career on that journey through the heavens."

The shift here is of significant theoretical consequence: instead of presenting a vivid picture for us to apprehend as spectators in front of, but at a distance from, a tableau, this second *enargeia* collapses distance between subject and object, in effect subjectifying the experience, since we obviously are being called upon to identify ourselves with the poet in participating similarly (or rather identically) in the described experience. What we are seeing in the difference between what I am terming *enargeia I* and *enargeia II* is the difference between the cool aesthetic based on distance between audience and object and the heated aesthetic based on fusion, or empathy, between audience and the object into which they enter (feel themselves into) as imaginary subjects. This becomes the basis of a strikingly different aesthetic, one that is emotionalist rather than mimetic, that dissolves the dimensions of a structured object into the free-ranging consciousness of the reader: an aesthetic that, consequently, would find any suggestion of the natural sign undesirable. We are on our way to Edmund Burke's Longinian distinction between the beautiful and the sublime (and his clear preference for the latter), which in turn foreshadows Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

There may well seem to be something perverse in my insistence
on broadening the range of the term *enargeia* so that it may also cover the tradition emerging from this second use of the term by Longinus. After all, *enargeia* is supposed to refer to the intensity of visual representation rather than to the intensity of emotional response; indeed, the latter—as we shall see—can lead to rejecting the value of accurate representation altogether. My claim is that by focusing only on the qualities (in *enargeia*) of vividness and intensity as psychological stimulants, psychologically measured, Longinus makes the shift to an audience- or reader-response theory inevitable. He expands the literal notion of *enargeia*, born in mimetic theory and referred to in his own initial definition of "images," to cover its internal effectiveness as it arouses an empathic response—the impulse to identification—in the audience or reader. What more intense awareness of the object could there be? Hence, by reducing the impact of precise visual outlines if the effect can be better produced by other means, *enargeia* loses its original connection with visual representation and eventually becomes an instrument to attack mimetic theory. Therefore, while I may be charged with misusing the term—or, at least, of shepherding its misuse—I would argue that in Longinus it does start out as an alternative *enargeia* by concentrating on our intense awareness of the verbally described object and that, though he does sharply change its direction, there is value in using the same word to demonstrate this inverse tradition, so long as the distinction between *enargeia* I and *enargeia* II is clearly maintained.

The appeal to *enargeia* II, as I will now freely call it, carries special privileges for the poetic power to go beyond the merely mimetic in its need to assert its power over the audience to make their subjectivity one with its own. Even in the midst of his initial reference to *enargeia* in what seemed its conventional sense (in my first quotations, above), Longinus makes a distinction between the use of images in poetry and their use in rhetoric. It is a distinction that seems to free the poet from the obligation to reproduce what he sees. In the sentence following his instruction, quoted above, for the writer to "see" what is being described and to place it "before the eyes" of the audience, he distinguishes between the ways in which the poet and the rhetorician would carry out that instruction: "Further, you will be aware of the fact that an image has one purpose with the orators and another with the poets, and that the design of the poetical image is enthrallment, of the rhetorical—vivid description." Strict adherence to *enargeia* I, then, is below the
loftier capacities of poetry. This distinction is the more striking in that it introduces generic differences between objectively determined literary kinds (poetry and rhetoric), almost in Aristotelian fashion, despite the fact that Longinus’s entire undertaking seems to be addressed to a desirable characteristic (the sublime) of passages that may occur anywhere in speech or writing of whatever kind. Such an ad hoc distinction argues that the need to free some writers (the poets) from the mere reproduction of images must have been as important to Longinus as it later was for those following in the Longinian tradition. Later in this chapter he reinforces this distinction as he summarizes the effectiveness of the image: “It is no doubt true that those [images] which are found in the poets contain, as I said, a tendency to exaggeration in the way of the fabulous and that they transcend in every way the credible, but in oratorical imagery the best feature is always its reality and truth.” Further, Longinus forbids the orator to borrow this specially transcendent poetic power: “Whenever the form of a speech is poetical and fabulous and breaks into every kind of impossibility, such digressions have a strange and alien air.” Consequently, he complains of contemporary orators who use images “like the tragedians.”

In the “fabulous” poetic power that Longinus encourages “the tragedians” to display but denies to the orators, we may be reminded of the special freedom Aristotle gave to epic poets to wander into the domain of the “wonderful.” We will be reminded too of Longinus’s elevation of the “marvelous” over the merely “credible,” which is central to his distinction between poetry and rhetoric, when we come to the more systematic version of that distinction that we will find in Mazzoni in Chapter 5, below. 2 We must remember that Plato assigned the mimetic function to all the arts as part of his program to condemn them as illusionary and deceptive. It is understandable that once succeeding critics, free of Plato’s puritanical strictures, sought instead to justify the mimetic character of the arts, many of them, even if still aware of the poet’s pictorial obligation, are yet devoted to the poet’s special power to give us verbal objects that are something more than nature’s substitutes.

The mimetic theorist has as an inevitable dilemma the desire to

2. In the chapters that follow I will track this claim of a special role for poetry, in contrast to non-poetry (whether “rhetoric” or “prose” or whatever term is used), as it is developed in Mazzoni, Diderot, Lessing, Coleridge, Bergson, the Russian Formalists, and the New Critics. It is this common theme that helps mark the postmoderns by their fervent opposition to it.
account for poetry's power to be loftier than nature while wanting it to emulate painting's power to reproduce nature. Many a mimetic theorist reacts to this dilemma with apparently contradictory claims: sometimes lauding poetry as a mimetic art with reproductive powers that rival painting's, sometimes lauding poetry as the art that leads us beyond mere copying, improving upon nature and leading us beyond, into the realm of wonder, of human alchemy. Where possible, the attempt may be made to make the two claims compatible by finding a way to claim the two, nature and the beyond-nature, as reconcilable by the poet.

Even as conventionally conservative a critic as was the Dryden who translated Du Fresnoy and wrote the preface I have discussed in Chapter 3, above, finds himself drawn beyond the mere imitation of nature to the imitation "of the best Nature, of that which is wrought up to a nobler pitch." This latter phrase should sound familiar to us, as an echo of its often-noted use in Dryden's earlier and more liberal "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668). Late in that essay he qualifies his continuing insistence on poetry's mimetic obligation as "a just and lively image of human nature": "a serious play . . . is indeed the representation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to a higher pitch." Given the desire to justify poetry—often on behalf of a Platonic moralism that contemns the state of nature, as well as on behalf of the desire to find functions for the verbal art that allow it to exploit all that language can open for us—it is not surprising that we can find within the mimetic tradition many such examples of divided attitudes toward the objects being represented in the words of a poem. In what may appear to be a philosophically innocent precursor of the Kantian dualism between nature and freedom, this tradition spawns critics who, without seeing any conflict between the two objectives, seem to want poems to paint nature and yet to improve upon it with a freer human vision, which can be projected only from beyond it.

But the introduction of this second power eventually has to come at the expense of the first. This special licensing of the poetic art, for

5. Chapter 5 deals with the extraordinary modifications produced by Renaissance thought in its exploitation of the special privileges of language as an alternative to picture-making.
those critics anxious to follow it to its consequences, might well
mean forsaking the *ut pictura poesis* command. To the extent that pic-
tures were seen as unproblematic representations of existing things,
the verbal art might well claim to do more, and in that *more* might
lie its superiority. Under this dispensation, it is not merely that
poems, because of their arbitrary and conventional medium, can-
not be pictures but that they are better off—indeed enjoy a special
liberty—by virtue of this incapacity. This is the shift I have begun to
mark in Longinus.

Strangely perhaps, it is in Addison, who seems to be influenced
as much by the Longinian tradition as by the Horatian— and by both
as much as by Locke—that we find a striking example of this divi-
sion of attitude between the power of the picture and the power of
the word, between the need of the word to emulate the natural sign
and the need of the word to do its own special thing. I cited the pas-
sage that I discussed in Chapter 3, above, as the ultimate example of
the aesthetic of the natural sign, with the arts, from sculpture to
music, arranged as a spectrum from the most natural-sign art to the
most arbitrary-sign art. And we saw literature there viewed only
insofar as it could use its words to emulate sculpture, or at least
painting. We saw Addison expand on those secondary pleasures of
the imagination associated with the comparison of “the ideas aris-
ing from the original objects, with the ideas we receive from the sta-
tue, picture, [verbal] description, or [musical] sound that represents
them.” He thus was recapitulating his spectrum of the arts and re-
affirming the natural-sign model that controls it. Thus he could echo
in *Spectator* 416 his attack on “false wit” (*Spectator* 58–62), which he
defined as the poet’s self-indulgence that permits words to call at-
tention to themselves and thus to obscure the clarity of the ideas
they are to represent.

Yet Addison cannot adhere consistently to this rigid, and rigidly
self-denying, view of the effects of language, not even for the bal-
ance of *Spectator* 416. Only a few lines later—perhaps because he
recalls himself to his fidelity to literature as a verbal art, or perhaps
he recalls himself to the influence of Longinus—he appears to re-
verse himself and to dwell upon the power of words to have more of

6. The strangely joint allegiance to the contradictory traditions seen as sponsored
by Horace and by Longinus is scattered through Addison’s work, as it is through that
of many of his contemporaries. Indeed, we see it earlier—and perhaps most in-
fluentially—in Boileau, who in the same year (1674) published his imitation of Horace
(*L’Art poétique*) and his translation of Longinus.
an effect upon us than faithful pictures of nature can, perhaps even
more than nature itself can:

Words, when well chosen, have so great a force in them, that a descrip-
tion often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves.
The reader finds a scene drawn in stronger colors, and painted more to
the life in his imagination, by the help of words, than by an actual survey
of the scene which they describe. In this case the poet seems to get the
better of Nature; he takes, indeed, the landskip after her, but gives it
more vigorous touches, heightens its beauty, and so enlivens the whole
piece, that the images which flow from the objects themselves appear
weak and faint, in comparison of those that come from the expressions.

He thus can examine the other side of the pictorial disadvantage of
words in order to give the verbal art an unanticipated ascendancy,
despite all he has done earlier to subject it to both the visual arts and
nature. Indeed, the verbal art suddenly emerges as potentially their
superior, and precisely because of its arbitrary (non-natural) signs.
The very fact that verbal description is not limited to what we are
able to view at a given point in space and time allows it to range
freely beyond what a picture, as a natural sign, permits: “In the sur-
vey of any object, we have only so much of it painted on the imag-
ination, as comes in at the eye; but in its description, the poet gives
us as free a view of it as he pleases.”

Further, the property of words is such that they can stimulate
“stronger colors” in the imagination than a faithful reproduction
can. The fact that language, as made up of arbitrary signs, is a me-
diating instrument means that it permits—indeed requires—inter-
pretation, thus leading to a response not altogether under the con-
trol of the text, so that readers “have a different relish of the same
descriptions” because of “the different ideas that several readers
affix to the same words.” This capacity of words as medium to stim-
ulate the interpreting reader to a breadth of response not available
to the observer of the faithful picture—or even to the observer of
nature itself as the source of the picture—allows Addison to reverse
the privileged place among the arts: in allowing “the poet to get the
better of nature,” Addison is, a fortiori, claiming poetry’s superiority
to natural-sign representation in sculpture or painting.

These notions are expanded and systematized by that prime Lon-
ginian, Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of
Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Since Burke is far less
divided than Addison in his consistent championing of the special effectiveness of words as a medium of art, he argues less ambiguously for the verbal arts in his extravagant rejection of pictorialism. Burke denies that the effect of words arises out of their giving our imaginations pictures of the objects they would represent. Consequently, unlike visual media, words are free from the limited function of the pictorial arts to mirror finite objects. He even suggests that words, as arbitrary sounds, are divorced from the need to be faithful to an external reality. But what they fail to give us descriptively they are freer to give us emotionally.

For this reason Burke attacks as false the claim of Abbé Du Bos, made as a natural-sign theorist on behalf of the visual arts, that the pictorial clarity of painting gives it a greater emotional impact than poetry does. Burke bases his refutation on the proposition that “a great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever.” The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind; though in general the effects of poetry are by no means to be attributed to the images it raises. . . . But painting, when we have allowed for the pleasure of imitation, can only affect simply by the images it presents” (pp. 106-7). “But let it be considered that hardly anything can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach toward infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea” (pp. 107-8). While Burke agrees with Du Bos about the greater clarity of painting and the greater obscurity of words, he reverses what, according to Du Bos, the effects of the two are likely to be on the passions of the observer or reader.

Burke tends to isolate and exaggerate Longinus’s occasional association of the sublime with the arousal of terror in the reader or hearer, since terror is seen as the strongest of our passions, and pas-

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8. Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (New York: Garland Publishing, 1971 [facsimile]), pp. 102-3. It is worth noting how different this call for verbal obscurity is from Lessing’s call for verbal clarity (see Chapter 2), though both are major influences in the anti-pictorial tradition. This difference is a measure of the distance between the visual and the verbal grounds for giving literature a special place.
sion is the proper objective of the sublime for Burke. As "an enemy to all enthusiasms" (a word—borrowed from contemporary Protestant teachings—that for Burke includes the passions), clarity, like the pictorial art that produces it, is left for the more trivial category of the "beautiful," while the necessarily "obscure" character of words, with their less predictable and less controlling—and hence less limiting—effects, can stimulate the wild grandeur of the "sublime" in the Protestant world of private enthusiasm.

It is one thing to make an idea clear, and another to make it affecting to the imagination. If I make a drawing of a palace, or a temple, or a landscape, I present a very clear idea of those objects; but then (allowing for the effect of imitation which is something) my picture can at most affect only as the palace, temple, or landscape would have affected in the reality. On the other hand, the most lively and spirited verbal description I can give, raises a very obscure and imperfect idea of such objects; but then it is in my power to raise a stronger emotion by the description than I could do by the best painting. This experience constantly evinces. The proper manner of conveying the affections of the mind from one to another, is by words; there is a great insufficiency in all other methods of communication; and so far is a clearness of imagery from being absolutely necessary to an influence upon the passions, that they may be considerably operated upon without presenting any image at all. (Pp. 101-2)

Burke's extreme conclusion is that poetry—in flight from imagistic precision or even from images themselves—"with all its obscurity, has a more general as well as a more powerful dominion over the passions than any other art" (p. 104).

A similar argument appears, ironically enough, in the later work of Du Bos's countryman Diderot, which is very likely indebted to Burke. We find in it the same association of the sublime with terror, and of both with the obscurity that is the proper atmosphere for both poet and reader.

Everything that astonishes the soul, everything that impresses a feeling of terror leads to the sublime. A vast plain does not astonish as the ocean does, nor the quiet ocean as the wild ocean does. Obscurity adds to the terror. . . . Clarity is good if one wants to be convincing; it is worthless if one wants to move. Clarity of any kind hurts enthusiasm. Poets—speak continually of eternity, of infinity, of immensity, of time, of space, of divinity, of tombs, of manes, of hell, of an obscure heaven, of the deep
seas, obscure forests, thunder, flashes of lightning that tear the clouds. Be dark. . . . There are, in all these things [the list has continued at some length], inexplicable terror, grandeur and obscurity.  

This passage makes it clear that Burke had a profound influence in France, home of the excessive commitment to a natural-sign aesthetic, besides his more obvious and more widely studied influence in Germany. But it is in Burke himself that we can trace the most forceful theoretical consequences of this counter-aesthetic—or is it, in its condescension toward the “beautiful” and the usual formal virtues associated with the “beautiful,” an anti-aesthetic?

Burke insists that the language arts can have a special hold on our emotions, our inner reality, in contrast to the visual arts, whose power is limited to presenting exact, if unmoving, reflections of outer reality. Free of the pictorial artist’s need to represent finite objects with visual precision, and equally free of any obligation to emulate that way of representing, the poet can use the connotative vagueness of his instrument—the fact that different readers will interpret words differently, will see different things, have different “ideas,” on hearing the identical words—to work upon the reader’s emotions. And the more suggestive, the less precisely definitive the words, the better.

It is on these grounds that Burke’s preference for the sublime over the beautiful must follow. He must prefer the sublime poem, whose very lack of precision permits it to spread its suggestive aura, to the beautiful poem, which can do little more than emulate the precision of the visual arts, with their natural-sign pictorialism, thus failing to exploit its own potential freedom from the mimetic. The vagaries of the idiosyncratic associations triggered by the words stimulate the production of a suggestive aura that looses the reader’s imagination. We can see that such stimulation can account for those characteristics in the gothic novel, as well as in much of the poetry of the age of sentiment and of the romantics, that aroused the contempt shown such work by formalist critics closer to the spirit of Aristotle, anxious to preserve a classic distance between the controlling poem and its objective observer and to condemn those works whose verbal looseness encouraged the vague unpredicatabilities of subjective exuberance.

9. Salon de 1767, in Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, vol. 11 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1876), pp. 146-47. These pieces were not published until 1798. The translations are mine.
In Burke, as less single-mindedly in Addison, once the critic moves from the pictorial imperative—moves, that is, from the obligations of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition that accompanies the mimetic theory of representation—language takes on major affective advantages unavailable to the visual, natural-sign arts. The very weakness—nay, the incapacity—of language as a surrogate natural sign is the source of its strength as a stimulus of emotion. Because language only suggests, but does not direct, how it is to be interpreted, the poet should play up that suggestiveness and exploit its inevitable vagueness instead of trying to force it to paint pictures that each reader would in any case construct differently from the hints cast by the poem's words.

In Plato it was assumed that the reader or hearer was controlled by the verbal object, being led by it to the idea it represented as a transparency. In Aristotle it was assumed that the audience was controlled by the verbal object, being coerced into the appropriate response through the precise stimulation by its strategically manipulated formal components. But in Burke, after Longinus, control passes from the object to the subject, from poem to reader. Burke himself, obviously embracing the emphasis on *enargeia II* by Longinus, proposes, as the appropriate response to the literary sublime, the term "sympathy" (the term "empathy" is not invented until more than a century later as an English translation of the German *Einfühlung*). Through sympathy, Burke tells us, "we enter into the concerns of others; . . . are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators. . . . [It is] a sort of substitution by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected . . . as he is affected" (p. 70). This "feeling-into" is just what the term "empathy" later is invented to signify: it is the word that expresses what in subjective theory has replaced the classic notion of aesthetic distance. For Burke it is this "sympathy" that in our response to the sublime replaces what in the beautiful is given to "description" ("We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description").

I mean here, as I did in my discussion of Longinus, to indicate how profoundly the development of theory was to be affected by this shift from the aesthetics of distance, in which the observer coolly measures the object, to the aesthetics of empathy, in which

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the observer merges his subjectivity into—and becomes one with—the object, transforming it into himself as subject. As Burke addresses Du Bos, he puts the opposition, and his preference, bluntly: "I know several who admire and love painting, and yet who regard the objects of their admiration in that art with coolness enough, in comparison of that warmth with which they are animated by affecting pieces of poetry or rhetoric" (p. 104). The tendency to treat the object as spatially fixed—as inevitably there within the mimetic impulse that produced the natural-sign aesthetic and saw the picture as the model aesthetic object—must give way under the impact of an aesthetic that begins with the primacy of the word.

This vision of language breaking free of the trap of spatiality arises as part of the desire to break eighteenth-century ideas free of the spatial enclosure of the neoclassical world view, both literary and philosophical. Time-consciousness, and the theories of evolution that accompany it, can claim a mimetic fidelity to the moments of our living that is urged at the expense of spatiality, which is subsequently taken to be only a false human superimposition upon human experience, and a fundamental misrepresentation of it. With the increasing dependence for our metaphors on time rather than space, there is a movement away from natural signs and toward arbitrary signs. Indeed, painting, so long guaranteed its place as the model art by the *ut pictura poesis* assumptions of the pictorialist tradition, yields up this place as the spectrum gradually reverses itself, so that what was the least likely art at the far end of Addison's spectrum now finds itself in the position of the model art. From Burke to Nietzsche to Pater we can trace the movement toward the radical universal claim that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."12

Because of its temporality, language flows as the frozen tableau

11. This sense of identification may be seen as working against drama criticism that would be conscious of the stage as moving picture, the framed proscenium that preserves fictionality. For to be such an audience presupposes a crucial sense of difference between the observer and the observed. Enemy of all forms of representation that would make us into observers of supposed imitations of nature, the empathic tradition, inevitably, becomes a major sponsor of the lyric.

12. Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione" (1877), in The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 124. The entire essay (pp. 120-43) seeks to expand on this claim. Earlier, Burke had used the effect of music as "proof" of the way to move the passions without any image at all (*Sublime*, p. 102); Shelley, like other romantics, invoked the wind-harp to help suggest the immediacy of expression; and Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1871) rests largely on the claim that "music is
cannot and thus has deeper affinities with the dark rhythms of primal existence out of which the emotions grow. In Nietzsche's extension of the sublime into the Dionysian, and in Bergson's adaptation of the latter for his less dark notion of the *élan vital*, one finds—still in keeping with the attitude we found in Burke—this special authenticity given to the moving dynamic of the temporal and denied to the flat, visual finitude of the spatial. The special affinity found among language, the disorderly, and the flux of inner experience and the attention paid—more and more paid, even, or especially, to our day—to the category of the "sublime" testify to the power of Burke's distinction and, after him, to Nietzsche's: a power that elevates a sense of something vague but profoundly primal with which we can be put in touch, provided the clean power of the "beautiful," the Apollonian, will be surrendered. The "music of our inner being," to which Bergson so often appeals, can be released through an engagement of our consciousness, next to which the distancing act of "objective" aesthetic judgment pales as a less than human response. In the telling opposition put forth much later by Müller-Freienfels, as an echo from Nietzsche, the virtues of being a Mit­spieler (participant) more than balance those of being a Zuschauer (observer). One must join in the dance; must, as dancer, become one with the dance, as a great post-Nietzschean poet tells us.

Behind this shift that I have been observing—from Longinus to Addison to Burke and beyond—in the respective positions of the verbal and visual arts, we have seen the development of a major challenger to the natural-sign aesthetic. But because it insists on the arts as an unrestrained expression of human internality, it too must insist upon a claim to being the natural art, the expression of nature, the nature of human nature. This claim to an alternative aesthetics of nature can, I believe, be traced back to Longinus. In an important passage in *On the Sublime*, Longinus may be seen as reversing the respective positions of the plastic arts and poetry as they relate to nature, for he rejects the exclusion of language from the domain of the natural (despite the fact that since it consists of arbitrary signs, language was always assumed by the natural-sign tradition to be an other-than-natural medium). Indeed Longinus suggests the con-


trary: that it is language alone that can properly be considered as a natural and immediate material for art.

Late in his argument on behalf of flawed greatness in preference to moderate perfection (chaps. 33–36), Longinus introduces a comparison between sculpture and the verbal arts as these relate to "mere" perfection on the one hand and greatness, with whatever flaws, on the other. In chapter 36 he distinguishes between art and nature, characterizing the plastic arts as "art" and human discourse as "nature." Although he concedes that "the faulty Colossus is not superior to the Spearman of Polycleitus," the judgment does not bother him, because "in art the utmost exactitude is admired" and these are works of art (i.e., plastic art). But different criteria are required for the arts of discourse because "grandeur [rather than utmost exactitude is admired] in the works of nature; and . . . it is by nature that man is a being gifted with speech. In statues likeness to man is the quality required; in discourse we demand, as I said, that which transcends the human." Thus Longinus associates perfection ("freedom from failings") with "art" and elevation (even if "unevenly sustained") with "nature." And the verbal arts, as a natural emanation—like speech itself—from the human being as author, must reach toward grandeur, whatever it may sacrifice in the exactitude of representation. Presumably those arts, like the plastic arts, which require the employment of implements external to the artist—and the training, the know-how, and the decision to use them—are conceived as crafts and are derived from artifice rather than nature, since the latter is reserved as the source for language, as a spontaneous human gift, and hence for the language arts.

(In my discussion of chapter 15 earlier in this chapter, I called

14. It is awkward, in this context, to use arts to include what I have been calling the verbal arts. I am here using art or arts without quotation marks to indicate our common use of the word, which would include the verbal arts, although Longinus's intention is to restrict "art" (which I am putting in quotation marks) to the plastic arts or crafts (his techne), leaving what we call the verbal arts to "nature."

15. This notion of art as internalized vision—with the final externalized work itself relegated to mere craft, seen as a less lofty talent dependent upon the artisan's external know-how with materials—remains an essential part of the expressionist tradition of which Longinus is usually acknowledged to be the source. Even a neoclassicist like Sir Joshua Reynolds reflects this notion in his insistence, at the start of his "Seventh Discourse" (1776), that art is not what he terms "a mechanical trade": "I wished you to be persuaded that success in your art depends almost entirely on your own industry; but the industry which I principally recommended is not the industry of the hands, but of the mind." There are many twentieth-century examples, usually
attention to Longinus's distinction between rhetoric and poetry, that is, between the merely credible or vividly real and the marvelous or enthralling. I suggest that we may be able to read that distinction into the terms of his present distinction between the arts of art and of nature—or, put another way, between the arts of exactitude and of grandeur. Might we then also see in the present distinction Longinus's suggestion that rhetoric is closer to "art" [unfailing correctness] and poetry closer to "nature" [a greatness beyond accuracy]? But there are problems in the suggestion of this echo of the earlier distinction since we must remember also that rhetoric, after all, is also an art of language for Longinus, and the present distinction would appear to treat all the arts of language similarly, without regard to genre. Nevertheless, within the arts of language Longinus's earlier distinction does linger as a projection onto this one, and within its shadow poetry does seem to be privileged above rhetoric.)

I am not proposing that Longinus is literally asserting the antithesis of what is asserted by the natural-sign aesthetic about which art is or is not a natural-sign art. Indeed, he is not concerned with sign relations at all, whether natural or non-natural. He is, instead, searching for quite different criteria, unrelated to semiotics, for bestowing the term "natural" on one of the arts and denying it to the others. Thus we must observe, in this apparent reversal of the way nature relates to the verbal arts on the one hand and to the plastic arts on the other, that Longinus is talking, not about the resemblance between artistic representation and its external object, but about the relation between the work of art and how it is created—whether by the natural gift of language in the verbal arts or by the manufacturing of an artifact in the plastic arts. He does not see the art object as a representation of another object but looks for the point of origin of the art object; and that point of origin has been shifted from the external object of imitation to the internal, natural endowments of the human mind.

The art that is designated as a natural-sign art, when the arts are viewed as forms of representation, is different from the art considered closest to nature, when the arts are viewed as modes of human expression. In the latter consideration, nature itself, as it realizes itself in the expressions of human nature, dictates that what other-

in some ways related to the work of Croce. Among the more important, see R. G. Collingwood, esp. The Principles of Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938).
wise was called the natural-sign arts be consigned to the category of artifice dependent upon external materials and implements. From these claims of Longinus—and of those, such as Addison and Burke, who later take up the Longinian tradition—it will follow that drama is a far less appropriate literary kind for “natural” human expression than are those verbal arts that are the external (and “natural”) expression of a single internal voice. Here clearly is an invitation to the lyric, and the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries took it as such.

No one took up this invitation with more theoretical enthusiasm than Shelley did, late in the history of this tradition, in his Defence of Poetry (1821). I want here to concentrate upon one side of this complex essay even though viewed in full, it reveals more than one conception of language as a poetic medium. Only this one side is needed here to extend what Longinus, Addison, and Burke have shown us so far about the unmediated, expressive powers of poetry. In Chapter 6, I will provide the fuller and more balanced treatment that Shelley’s document requires, since it is both a major—if two-sided—statement about the role of language as an aesthetic medium and a troublesome example of the theoretical difficulty encountered in the attempt to assign that role with consistency.

In his Defence Shelley gives us a more explicit version of the Longinian claim for poetry’s uniquely natural status, privileging lyric poetry among the arts because of its “natural” relation to its author as an immediately expressive vehicle for his internality. This relation can be traced to poetry’s intimate alliance with the imagination, “whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man.” Inner human nature supersedes external nature as the nature to which art—a freer art—is responsible. Shelley sees language as “a more direct [i.e., unmediated] representation . . . of our internal being . . . than colour, form, or motion” because it is “more plastic and obedient to the control” of the imagination. Indeed, “language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination,” unlike “colour, form, or motion,” produced as a result of the “materials, instruments, and conditions” of the other arts, the non-verbal and more tangible arts. In these other arts, their materials, instruments, and conditions

"limit and interpose between conception and expression," while, more ideally, language as the instrument of the imagination in poetry acts "as a mirror which immediately reflects" the first ("conception") in the second ("expression"). By contrast, the arts other than poetry, far from reflecting "the light" of the imagination, dependent on the manipulation of materials external to the human mind, are relegated to functioning only mediately, "as a cloud which enfeebles" that light.

We can well understand, then, that Shelley considers the verbal art as the very "hieroglyphic" of thought, its character a natural emanation of human internality, almost as if he were endorsing some sort of automatic writing. On the other hand, it is the more physically based arts, those that have set out to work with external instruments and materials, that must reconcile themselves to being distanced from, and related only by way of a transforming medium to, any internal source in human intuition. So again the relation among the arts proposed by the natural-sign aesthetic has been inverted: with Shelley as with Longinus, the ground for assigning immediate and natural, rather than mediate and artificial, roles to the several arts rests not on representational transparency (as in the natural-sign aesthetic) but on closeness to the source of expression. Signs are to be related internally to their author (subject) rather than externally, as vehicles of representation, to their object. Once within poetry, when one is making a preference among literary kinds, the ascendancy of lyric poetry over the older notions of drama is a necessary accompaniment to this shift in both semiotics and epistemology.

We have arrived, then, at an aesthetic that emphasizes the work of art as the emanation of human internality rather than as the reflection of an external reality. It sponsors another version of the "natural" that appears opposed to the aesthetic of the natural sign, but not quite; for we cannot properly relate this one to the natural sign, since it functions in the realm of genesis rather than of semiotics. Nevertheless, here too authority is being claimed for "nature"

17. I remind the reader of my need to concede—and to address the concession—that Shelley presents another, apparently contradictory position in the same essay just two paragraphs later. There he treats the language of poems, not as automatic expression, but as he here treats the media of the other arts: as a medium in which manipulations are required among the verbal sounds to adjust the relation that they have toward "each other." Still, Shelley's primary and usual allegiance is to an immediate relation between thought or vision and the words that carry it. I will address these alternatives and the theoretical problems they create in Chapter 6, below.
over the arbitrariness of convention. Unlike the other arts, which depend upon the mediation of the making process, poetry, as the unmediated cry of the human heart, is nature itself—our nature—speaking. As the cry of the heart, complete and authentic in itself, it can only suffer by being imposed upon by the inhibitions produced by the arbitrary conventions of making poems.

In this extreme form, the aesthetic of subjectivity, by its simple reversal of the terms of the natural-sign aesthetic, seems to be in flight from any control by form in its promotion of an unrestrained expressiveness. This reversal of the positions of the pictorial arts and music as model for poetry is indicative of the shift in emphasis from referential precision to referential obscurity. Whether, for example, it is Burke's encouragement of a wilful vagueness to stimulate the reader's emotional suggestibility or Shelley's encouragement of an automatic writing to carry out the poet's visionary license to seek instant voice, this aesthetic threatens to become an anti-aesthetic whose rejection of too narrow a conception of form may lead to the total abandonment of form. As a less extreme corrective, the expressive emphasis of the human being as a visionary creature will be joined to the making emphasis of the human being as craftsman-poet—but not until the aesthetics of organicism comes to be formulated at the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth and then develops toward modernism. Moving beyond the crude replacement of a static reality with the self-indulgent human subject as the source of art, more systematic organicists will seek to complete the transfer of central concern from the objects out there being individually represented by natural signs to the constructed objects produced by mind and labor, as these express themselves in the signs they work to put together. Chapter 6, below, dealing with theories of language as poetic medium, will pursue this attempted synthesis into the articulation of the modernist poetic and, in doing so, will address Shelley's own movement in this direction by exploring the complications of his essay that have been evaded here.

But stopping for now with the view I have been tracking in this chapter, which sees poetic language primarily as an unmediated instrument of expression, we can find in it a forceful, if exaggerated, alternative to the longstanding primary concern with the poem as a reflection of external reality, one that rejects or at least utterly transforms that concern. Further, we have seen that the tradition from Longinus to Burke to Shelley has sought to claim that only its sort
of product, as a verbal product, is the "natural" one, even though we must redefine what "nature" is—from nature out there as reproducible to human nature as internal but expressible—in order to make the connection work. Shelley's extreme version of these arguments permits the tradition to progress toward its ultimate formulation in twentieth-century intuitionists like Benedetto Croce, for whom all of nature is human nature as created, or projected, in the idealistic identity of intuition and expression, which is fully projected in the sublimity of poetry.

Before leaving this tradition of theorizing, however, I should also mention here another and more recent extension that emphasizes a different aspect of it and yet seems ultimate in its own way. It leads, by way of Bergsonian intuitionism, to the so-called "consciousness criticism" of the mid-twentieth century (especially in the sixties), most influentially represented in the Geneva School by Georges Poulet. The emphasis emerges out of the doctrine of empathy (Einfühlung)—a feeling-into that subjectifies every object as a receptacle for an ever-transforming subjective self—the doctrine that I claimed to find earlier in this chapter behind Longinus's shift from enargeia I to enargeia II. Indeed, I placed the beginnings of the doctrine of empathy behind Longinus's shift from enargeia I to enargeia II. Indeed, I placed the beginnings of the doctrine of empathy there. In contrast to the classic distance that is maintained when the object is seen out there as object—in clear distinction from the observing and evaluating subject—what is being called for in an empathic relation is the dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy. Indeed, nothing less than a total identification is to be achieved between author and text, between reader and text, and hence between reader and author meeting in the fusion of consciousness (between self and other, the self made other as the other is made self) that is the text as read.

This pursuit of an identity, in overcoming the distinctness between self and other, overcomes the definition of—and separation between—beings and entities. It is, as I earlier said, the opposite of the classic sense of distance between subject and object, the former in the position of observing and measuring and judging the latter as a differentiated entity on its horizon. In sympathy with Bergson and many Continental existentialists and personalists, a critic like Poulet sees objectification, like the spatializing which accompanies it, as the enemy: as that which freezes consciousness and so impedes the breakthrough and the melting as the proper reading response. Clearly, any suggestion of pictorialism is to be rejected: we are not to succumb to those discrete objects of imitation that are the
source of *enargeia* I (as traced in my Chapter 3), since they are, in their bounded fixity, enemies of the flow of a released consciousness. Such a surrender to stasis must be resisted. The only distance to be entertained is an always supple “interior distance,” with exterior distance internalized as it is dissolved into the realm of “human time.”

Yet, as in Bergson, in Poulet’s concern for temporality there seems to be no way—even in the ever-changing movements of consciousness and self—to escape the danger of resorting to the spatialization of time itself. There is discoverable in every text a still point after all, the “point of departure,” the Cartesian *cogito* into which the reader seeks to allow the self to flow. For one to attain an identity with the other (no longer quite other), there must be a “place” in which it can occur. Through the *cogito*, consciousness has for Poulet become a god-word. By the breakthrough, via the *cogito*, to a shared consciousness, the reading experience has attained a mystical presence, transcending difference, that, for the duration of the experience at least, dwells in a sacred place. This is, surely, the ultimate act of empathy.

Such a sacralizing act carries a cost with it, since it emerges out of the desire to dissolve the limits of the spatializing imagination and is subverting that desire in the act of being realized. As in all the privileging of temporality since Heraclitus, even in the melting of objects into the experiential flux, time must have a stop: language fights with itself—its aspirations for perpetual motion with its logocentric limitations—in the war between movement and stasis that has been with us since Zeno’s paradox first blocked all ultimate thinking about the temporalizing of space. What is left is an attempt to return to the text as object, but only on new—and newly liberated—terms. And beyond what has been offered by those we have examined here from Longinus to Burke to Shelley to Poulet, this attempt is to be the subject of my later chapters.

18. I am referring to Poulet’s major works, *Studies in Human Time* and *The Interior Distance*, both translated by Elliott Coleman and published by the Johns Hopkins Press in 1956 and 1959, respectively. I should note also the monumental work whose central concern most closely approaches my own in this book, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966). Here Poulet traces through history those motions of consciousness that dissolve the circle as a fixed figure while falling under its power. Much in his treatment of the figure anticipates the crucial role that I claim the circle plays in modernism (see Chapter 7).