

JAMES BOSWELL'S URBAN  
EXPERIENCE  
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY  
LONDON

MARKKU KEKÄLÄINEN

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# INTRODUCTION

James Boswell wrote to his friend William Johnson Temple on May 1, 1761:

I grant you, that my behaviour has not been entirely what it ought to be. But, consider my particular situation. A young fellow whose happiness was always centered in London. Who had at last got there; and who had begun to taste it's delights – Who had got his mind filled with the most gay ideas – getting into the Guards being about Court – enjoying the happiness of the *Beau Monde* & the Company of men of Genius: in short, every thing that he could wish.<sup>1</sup>

London was the passion, fate and fulfilment of Boswell's life; the British metropolis was the centre of his social life, intellectual activity and literary imagination. This dissertation aims to reconstruct Boswell's urban experience according to five central themes. First, the distinction between country and city; secondly, the reception of the city as the imaginative reflection of multiplicities; thirdly, the city as a source of spectacular pleasure; fourthly, the metropolis as a scene of theatrical politeness; and finally the metropolis as a locale of libertine eroticism. My central argument is that Boswell's urban experience included two culturally quite distant main elements: the romantic sensibility on the one hand and the early modern, strongly aristocratic set of values and predilections on the other. Boswell's immediate and fervently emotional reception of the urban world was both "sentimental" and "romantic" but the content of his experience was something very foreign to the early romantic mainstream: the object of his 'Byronic' longing was the city and the crowd, court and the fashionable society, not wilderness, archaic periphery or "authentic" countryside. Aestheticism is the concept which connects these two dimensions; aestheticism as a mode of experience and aestheticism as a way to value people, things and phenomena. The cultural historical frames of the interpretation of Boswell's urban experience are exceptionally wide because it both owed much to the seventeenth-century aristocratic culture and had conspicuous similarities with the nineteenth-century dandyism and *flânerie*.

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Eighteenth-century London with its various facets has been under intense examination during the recent decades. This dissertation intends to contribute to this discussion from

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<sup>1</sup> James Boswell, *The Correspondence of James Boswell and William Johnson Temple 1756–1795, Vol. I: 1756–1777* (ed. Thomas Crawford). Edinburgh, New Haven and London, 1997, 33.

the subjective perspective of a highly original and sensitive writer; Boswell's remarks and reflections are an exceptional source material for an urban historian because of their detailed observations, subtle analysis and novel viewpoints. My aim is to examine Boswell's relationship to the city in a wider cultural historical context and draw a unified picture of his urban experience. The central question is what kind of cultural currents interweaved in Boswell's urban experience on the one hand, and how he identified himself as an urban gentleman in the intersection of discrepant civilizing forces on the other.

The term 'experience' does not refer to any kind of psychological or social psychological conceptualization. Instead it denotes literary, often autobiographical, representations of the self's reflective attitudes towards urban sociability in its multi-faceted nature. Furthermore, experience in this sense includes the textual representations of the active attitude towards the self in the urban context, the fashioning of the self according to polyphonic metropolitan milieu. I would like to emphasize that I do not claim that autobiographical texts could be any kind of window to the authors "real" self or his "real" experience. In this dissertation, 'urban experience' is a purely textual construction and should be analyzed as such.

I have received some preliminary ideas for this work from some authors in the field of sociology, philosophy and literature. The notion of the city as a theatrical spectacle has an important place in my overall account. I have here an obvious debt to the work of two authors. First, Lewis Mumford has described city life as a collective drama and, according to him the representative 'social parade' of the early-modern city was a modification of this basic conception.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, Richard Sennett has argued that the public life in eighteenth-century London and Paris was based on theatrical principles; the social intercourse was recognized as a play with social masks without any reference to the performer's personal qualities. However, according to Sennett, this theatrical sociability began to decline by the end of the century.<sup>3</sup> The argument is without doubt an over-generalization, but it illuminates some important trends in eighteenth-century urbanity: the theatrical element, that is to say the play with social identities on the urban scene, was found highly problematic in the contemporary debates. It can be argued that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the theatrical attitude towards sociability was a kind of counter-current. I am going to connect Boswell to this theatrical orientation; he found his public figure as a fundamentally malleable entity and the public self was, for him, an artefact, an outcome of the conscious self-fashioning.

The artistic fashioning of the self is an ancient idea but it had a specific meaning in the early-modern context. The secular forms self-fashioning dates back to the Italian

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects*. New York and London. 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*. New York, 1978.



Renaissance, especially to Baldessare Castiglione, whose neo-Platonic ideas of the perfection of the self and the pursuit of beautiful life had an enormous impact on the early-modern culture of politeness. In Renaissance Europe, according to Stephen Greenblatt, there emerged an increased consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as an artful process. He has connected this artistic activity on the self to literary production.<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault has used the term ‘techniques of the self’ when he has written about the Greek and Roman procedures of the cultivation of the self. Remarking had an important role in this basically aesthetic activity.<sup>5</sup> Autobiographical writing has also in early-modern and modern Europe been an important medium of self-scrutinizing and self-fashioning, and in Boswell’s self-fashioning project, his journals had a crucial role. Boswell’s autobiographical writing has been examined by several scholars. Most of them have emphasized the plurality of Boswell’s literary identities and the central role of imagination in his autobiographical writing.<sup>6</sup> Imagination and plurality of identity are crucial concepts also in my approach to discover Boswell’s attitudes towards his public self.

The aim of Boswell’s aesthetic self-fashioning was a reserved but polite and sociable, self-confident and externally splendid urban gentleman. Early-modern and eighteenth-century culture of politeness has been an important topic in recent historical scholarship. In the focus of the debates has been the nature of the eighteenth-century British culture of politeness: politeness and commercialism, gender and politeness, eighteenth-century politeness and its relationship to the earlier layers of courtesy and civility, and the extension of the concept of politeness have been among the central themes. One of the central questions in my dissertation is how should Boswell’s theory of urban politeness be situated in the field of the contemporaneous interpretations of politeness. From the viewpoint of this dissertation, the studies of Anna Bryson, Philip Carter, Lawrence E. Klein, and Markku Peltonen have been especially profitable. When Carter and Klein have emphasized a rupture between pre- and post-1688 British culture of politeness and the relative uniformity of the eighteenth-century politeness, Bryson and Peltonen have detected continuities and mixed patterns of courtesy and civility in the field of early-modern and eighteenth-century politeness. Boswell’s theory of politeness would seem to support the opinion that eighteenth-century culture of politeness was quite a heterogeneous formation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Steven Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago and London, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*. New York, 1985; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*. New York, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self*. New York/London, 1966; Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. Baltimore and London, 1989; Patricia Mayer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing modes of Conduct in Early Modern England*. Oxford, 1998; Philip Carter, ‘James Boswell’s Manliness’, in *English Masculinities 1660—1800* (ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen). London and New York, 1999; Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of*

Boswell's manliness in the context of eighteenth-century gentlemanly culture has recently been examined. Erin Mackie connects Boswell's gentlemanly ideals to the cultural shifts in post-1688 England. According to her, the eighteenth century gentlemanly culture was characterized by the juxtaposition of the gentleman and the criminal. The gentleman was not alone the figure of hegemonic masculinity, Mackie argues, but he is among the rake, the highwayman and the pirate a culturally prestigious masculine type through which the hegemony is secured. The most characteristic feature of the modern form of masculinity was that now masculinity was recognized as an inner quality, as a part of personal subjectivity. According to Mackie, *The Beggar's Opera's* Macheath was one of the figures through which the young Boswell reflected his manliness; Gay's rakish highwayman was, in Boswell's masculine imagery, a complementary epitome to Mr. Spectator, a representative of taste and civilized behaviour. These two fictional characters made Boswell possible to accommodate both the rake and the gentleman in the same person in his self-reflection.<sup>8</sup> David M. Weed argues that Boswell's gentlemanly identity vacillated between Scots, English, aristocratic, and bourgeois male identities. He tried to manage these ambiguities with the fictional identifications of 'the man of pleasure', 'the man of dignity' and 'the man of economy'.<sup>9</sup> Philip Carter also recognizes a cultural shift in the post-revolutionary period; the new culture of politeness was at first based on the Lockean idea of inward civility and, in the second half of the century, more and more on the cult of sentiment. The man of feeling was replacing the Addisonian gentleman. He has dealt with Boswell's masculinity and attitudes towards politeness. According to Carter, besides the Augustan characteristics, Boswell's gentlemanly identity had a strong sentimental element; Carter recognizes this feature in Boswell's reflections on love as well as in his identification with his clients as a barrister.

Like Mackie and Wood, I would emphasize the plurality of Boswell's masculine identities as well as their semi-fictional character. I would see his urban identities, on the one hand, as a manifestation of his experimental attitude towards reality and, on the other hand, in the context of his theory of urban politeness. Boswell recognized himself as an exceptionally sensitive person, so, as Carter argues, Boswell's gentlemanly self

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*Polite Society, Britain 1660—1800*. London, 2001; Philip Carter, 'Polite 'Persons': Character, Biography and the Gentleman', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), pp. 333—54; Lawrence A. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', in *Historical Journal*, 32, 3 (1989); Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness. Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England*. Cambridge, 1994; Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness for plebs: Consumption and social identity in early eighteenth-century England', in *The Consumption of Culture 1600—1800: Image, Object, Text* (ed. Ann Bermingham & John Brewer) 1995; Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour*. Cambridge, 2003; Markku Peltonen, 'Politeness and Whiggism', in *The Historical Journal* (2005).

<sup>8</sup> Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: the Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century*. Baltimore, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> David M. Weed, 'Sexual Positions: Men Pleasure, Economy, and Dignity in Boswell's "London Journal"', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter, 1997/1998), 215—234.

had a conspicuous sentimental or romantic flavour. I would argue, however, that his gentlemanly ideal was a three-faceted figure: it had a strong romantic and affective characteristic; it owed something to Addisonian gentlemanliness; but it also had a layer which dated back to the early-modern courtier ideals. This early-modern aristocratic aspect can also explain the much discussed libertine feature in Boswell's sexuality.

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Among Boswell's texts, his journals have a privileged position as source material in this dissertation. Autobiographical writing was, for him, a medium for self-fashioning, and London was the milieu which actualized his active attitude towards the self. In short, the autobiographical reflection on his urban identity, or identities, was a central element in Boswell's urban experience; London was a kind of laboratory in which he could test his roles. Boswell's two travel accounts on Corsica and the Scottish Highlands are highly illustrative of his thoughts on the civilized state of life. I have used extensively his essays on different topics, and, among them, the essays on the profession of a player are extremely important because in them he formulated most explicitly his view of sociability as a kind of theatrical display.

I have used some contemporary and earlier authors to reconstruct cultural coordinates for Boswell's urban experience. Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and Samuel Johnson are among them for two self-evident reasons: they were the most prominent figures in the urban discourse of the century, and Boswell had an intensive relationship to all of them, in Johnson's case of course in the form of personal friendship. Lord Chesterfield is a highly important point of comparison for the reconstruction of Boswell's theory of politeness. His extreme position in the contemporary discussions on civility helps to locate Boswell's own position. William Shenstone and some other sentimental, pre-romantic and romantic writers also serve as a point of comparison to uncover Boswell's similarities with and differences to the sentimental and romantic currents of the century. I have also utilized conduct books, pamphlets and popular city guides to sketch the common attitudes towards urban phenomena.

## *A Romantic Mondain*

'Romantic as I am', Boswell wrote to Temple on May 17, 1766.<sup>10</sup> Boswell's romantic dimension has been discussed for a long time. Peter Martin has recognized a certain two-faceted character of his cultural identity: he calls that 'romantic-classical' feature in Boswell. Martin connects the classical side to Boswell's neo-classical schooling in

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<sup>10</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Temple*, 148.

Edinburgh and to his father's stern rationality. The romantic side was a reaction to the austere milieu, and imagination was the main means to create a happier world.<sup>11</sup> The emotional orientation had also a more serious origin. After an acute depression in 1757, Boswell turned to Methodism because of its emotional reassurance of faith as a route to salvation.<sup>12</sup> Martin follows Chauncey Tinker's interpretation along which the analytical and rational Enlightenment was a mental straitjacket to Boswell's emotional and imaginative 'Byronic' character. According to Tinker, Boswell suffered 'incomprehensible longings for a larger experience', which longing was foreign to the people with whom he lived.<sup>13</sup> Frederick A. Pottle agrees with Tinker when he finds a striking similarity between Byron's accounts of his passion for Mary Duff and Boswell's notes on his falling in love when he was eight years old.<sup>14</sup> Max Byrd recognizes a longer continuum. Boswell's restlessness, play with roles and his fragmented self had strong similarities with Rousseau, Sterne, Chatterton and the other figures of the age of sensibility, but, Byrd continues, 'Boswell's consuming egoism...leaps forward toward a later generation of urban sensibility, that delimited by Baudelaire and Dickens'.<sup>15</sup>

'I was rather too singular. Why not? I am in reality an original character', Boswell wrote in Germany in 1764, and he continued in highly self-confident mood, 'Let me moderate and cultivate my originality.'<sup>16</sup> He connected the uniqueness of his life to the romantic aspect of his personality when he wrote to Temple on March 30 1767: 'My life is one of the most romantic that I believe either you or I really know of'.<sup>17</sup> Boswell's conception of the original genius suggested to some pre-romantic currents in eighteenth-century culture. The idea emerged in the texts of the first "graveyard poets". An influential point of departure was Edward Young's distinction between mechanical imitation and the organic or vegetable nature of originality when he wrote about the 'vital roots' of genius.<sup>18</sup> In the end of the century, Wordsworth gave the full formulation to the idea of the man of exceptional sensibility. 'All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings',<sup>19</sup> Wordsworth wrote in his *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, and, according to him, the 'Poet' felt more enthusiasm, more tenderness and more lively sensibility than was common among mankind.<sup>20</sup> The medical and quasi-

<sup>11</sup> Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell*. London, 1999, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Martin 1999, 51-2.

<sup>13</sup> Chauncey Brewster Tinker, *Young Boswell*. Boston, 1922, 180—4; see also D. B. Wyndham Lewis, *The Hooded Hawk, or The Case of Mr. Boswell*. London, 1946.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years*. London, 1966, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Max Byrd, *London Transformed: Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century*. New Haven and London, 1978, 98-100.

<sup>16</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland*. London, 1953, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Temple*, 181.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Jarvis, 'Criticism, taste, aesthetics', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740—1830* (ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee). Cambridge, 2004, 30—2.

<sup>19</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, vol. I: Preface*. London, 1800., xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Manning, 'Sensibility', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740—1830* (ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee). Cambridge, 2004, 94.

medical theories of the somatic location and expression of ‘sensibility’ and its connections to the exceptionally refined nervous organization were also in the background of the speculations on the nature of the creative genius.<sup>21</sup> According to George E. Haggarty, the interest in the ‘exquisite seat of sensation and sensibility’ exposed the elitism at the heart of sensibility.<sup>22</sup> The over-developed imagination led Boswell sometimes to unreal grandiose fantasies, the feature that Martin calls Byronic escapism.<sup>23</sup> This highly exclusive attitude was characteristic to Boswell’s relation to the world; the finest nuances of social and aesthetical experience were only for the selected few.

Boswell was well-known for his ‘sensationalism of experience’;<sup>24</sup> he sought extreme mental dispositions which served as material for his literary work. The capacity for exceptional sensations was a mark of mental nobility; the culture of sensibility and later Romanticism cherished the idea of the man of feeling who, like the protagonist of Henry Mackenzie’s novel *The Man of Feeling* (1774), ‘feels and weeps for others so much that, enfeebled by his sympathies, he wastes away and dies – a man too good for an unfeeling world.’<sup>25</sup> This kind of ‘sensibility’ was not something that everyone could own. ‘It was a special kind of susceptibility’, writes John Mullan, ‘so special, in fact, that, while a privilege, it could also be a kind of affliction. Those with sensibility had finer nerves than others, and were more easily discomposed or disturbed by their own feelings.’<sup>26</sup>

There was a group of heterogeneous counter-Enlightenment trends in eighteenth-century culture which emphasized immediate feeling instead of reason, religious sentiment instead of rational deism or freethinking, feudal and agrarian tradition instead of social emancipation, wilderness instead of cultivated nature, rural countryside instead of metropolis, honest and sincere friendship instead of polite sociability, authentic love instead of gallantry and libertinage. According to Marshall Brown, little by little the romantic ‘countercurrents of Enlightenment culture...become the main currents of Romantic thought’.<sup>27</sup> Anti-urbanism and the strengthening critique towards the cosmopolitan fashionable society and its “corrupt” lifestyle were essential elements of the pre-romantic and romantic cultural ethos. The glorification of periphery, countryside, and the authentic feelings of the “authentic” common people were

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<sup>21</sup>Manning 2004, 83; John Brewer, ‘Sentiment and Sensibility’, in *The New Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (ed. James Chandler). Cambridge, 2009, 21—44.

<sup>22</sup>George E. Haggarty, *Men in Love. Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century*. New York, 1999. 102.

<sup>23</sup>Martin 1999, 45.

<sup>24</sup>Joan. H. Pittock, ‘Boswell as Critic’, in *New Light on Boswell* (ed. Greg Clingham). Cambridge, 1991, 80.

<sup>25</sup>John Mullan, ‘Feelings and Novels’, in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (ed. Roy Porter). London and New York, 1997, 122.

<sup>26</sup>Mullan 1997, 121.

<sup>27</sup>Marshall Brown, ‘Romanticism and Enlightenment’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (ed. Stuart Curran). Cambridge, 1993, 28.

commonplaces in romantic imagery from its very beginning. Boswell's position in this context was highly ambiguous because of his emphasized urbanism, his affection for the most cultured forms of developed civilization and his strong fascination with the courtly formalities and polite sociability.

'Happy he! Who early sees that true happiness is distinct from noise, from bustle, and from ceremony,' architect James Malton wrote in his *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture* (1798).<sup>28</sup> 'The country is *not* the city; it is what stands in contrast to the city, providing the alternative scene of cultural value', writes W.J.T. Mitchell about the obsession with rural scenes in British Romanticism.<sup>29</sup> One of the strongest statements for the uncultivated rustic life was written by William Wordsworth in the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.<sup>30</sup>

The simplicity of the countryside and the common people was closer to the authentic essence of things; the 'elementary feelings' were in hand in their purest forms among the simple rustic people. All that included a strong implicit critique towards the complex forms of the sophisticated lifestyle of the fashionable metropolis. This attitude included a firm anti-court ethos, which had already begun in the first decades of the eighteenth century, in the moral weeklies and the works of Shaftesbury. Rural nostalgia and anti-urbanism had been obvious since the first manifestations of the British pre-romantic sensibility in the poetry of Edward Young and Thomas Gray in the 1740s, and the current strengthened towards the end of the century. This nostalgia was not limited to literature but the Gothic revival in architecture was one element in the same cultural stream.<sup>31</sup>

Boswell shared some central elements of the pre-romantic ethos: his religiosity was strongly aesthetical and emotional, and his pro-Catholic sentiment was very close to the

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<sup>28</sup> Ann Bermingham, 'The Simple Life: Cottages and Gainsborough's Cottage Doors' in *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740—1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste* (ed. Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask and David Simpson). Cambridge, 2005, 37.

<sup>29</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Country Matters', *The New Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature* (ed. James Chandler). Cambridge, 2009, 246-247.

<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth, *Lyrical ballads I, Preface*, x-xi.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell 2009, 254—5.

romantic religious sensibility; sometimes Boswell glorified the feudal past (he was, for instance, convinced of the basic inequality of men) and he saw himself as a romantic Old Scots Baron; his cult of the exceptional sensibility of a creative person had manifest similarities with the Romantic conception of the original genius; and most importantly, his mode of experience was dominated by a strong enthusiasm and immediate and emotional identification, rather than by rational calculation and critical distance. But when we examine the content of Boswell's urban experience the picture changes radically. In spite of his archaic feudal fancies, his real enthusiasm for the aristocracy was connected with the highest nobility of the cosmopolitan fashionable society; the highly polished courtier was his aristocratic ideal figure, not the provincial backwoods peer. Aristocracy in this sense was a strongly urban phenomenon; the court aristocracy in Britain (like in the Continent, too) had urbanized since the sixteenth century, and this urbanization included the extensive adaptation of the continental cultural innovations in the fields of arts, manners, and the institutions of sociability and leisure. It was *this* layer of the metropolitan culture which was in the focus of Boswell's urban experience.

The identification with the court and fashionable society implied some highly important cultural distinctions. The core issue was the question of identity: should a man's outward behaviour reflect his inner moral qualities, or could he fashion his malleable self according to the social situation and intentions? In the early modern courtly and aristocratic tradition social intercourse had been understood as a theatrical dissimulation and a play with social masks. The former opinion had strengthened because since John Locke's inward civility and Joseph Addison's and Richard Steele's conception of the honest gentleman the correspondence between inner moral qualities and outward behaviour had been seen as the crucial feature of the new British gentlemanly model, and the romantic current added the cult of sincere friendship and authentic love to this ideal. Boswell did not share these main stream views of his contemporaries. According to him, polite sociability was fundamentally theatrical dissimulation which required aesthetical fashioning of the self, and even in the closest friendships it was necessary to keep certain distance and *retenu*. Boswell's theory of love, if there was one, was as far as possible from the early romantic conception of trustworthy and authentic love: on the one hand, his opinion about marriage represented the ultra-conventional view of marriage as principally a feudal family affair, and, on the other hand, in his pre- and extramarital intrigues he was a full-blooded early modern libertine.

### *The Contingency of the City*

According to my argument, the city as a seat of anonymous crowd and multiple sensations was a highly distinctive feature in Boswell's urban experience, because, for



Boswell, the multiplicity of the city was a spring of ecstatic pleasure, not, like for the majority of his contemporaries, the source of moral ambiguities. The eighteenth-century reception of the big city had from the reformers and satirists of the turn of the century been characterized by a strong moralist overtone: the city was full of moral, political and physical threats, and this sometimes nightmarish vision included both the crime and debauchery of the lower classes and the opulent luxury and extravagant pleasures of the fashionable society.<sup>32</sup> The anti-urban attitude strengthened among the pre-romantic and romantic currents, when the uncorrupted countryside and the authentic life of the common people had been seen as a counter picture to the apocalyptic vision of the corrupted metropolis. Boswell's affirmative and morally neutral attitude towards the extravagant luxury of the court and the highest nobility as well as his furious enthusiasm for the myriad sensations of the anonymous city scene were quite unique in the eighteenth-century British culture. In a sense, he can be seen both as a follower of the seventeenth-century urban aristocracy and as an antecedent of the nineteenth-century dandyism and *flânerie*.

Besides the semi-public world of clubs, coffee-houses, and theatres, Boswell's experience of the city as a spatial entity had perplexingly two seemingly contradictory facets, the representative spheres of the fashionable society and court on the one hand, and the "modern" world of anonymous crowd, the multiplicity of the inanimate objects and the shady world of the London *demi-monde* on the other. The attitude towards both dimensions was affirmative, emotional, and aesthetical, and he did not make any moral distinctions concerning the urban phenomena. The "modern" facet of Boswell's urban experience incorporated some elements which blossomed to full flower in nineteenth-century dandyism and *flânerie*: ecstatic identification with the crowd and the multiple sensations of the city; the over-aesthetical reception of both "high" and "low" elements of the metropolitan reality; the "decadent" fascination with the extravagant luxury; fashioning of the self as an artistic artefact; and the strong sense of the transitory nature of the city life.

Contingency and transitoriness as a crucial element in the modern urban experience have long been themes in urban history and literature. Such classics of urban history and sociology, as Robert Park, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, have also emphasized the rootlessness and transitoriness – as well as freedom and the individuality made possible by them – as the central elements of the experience of the modern city. Weber transposed this definition to the definition of the city itself: the city is the social form which permits the greatest degree of individuality and uniqueness in each of its actual occurrences in the world.<sup>33</sup> A 'cosmopolite' did not mean only the 'citizen of the world' or a person who accepted strangers around him. Besides this, a

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<sup>32</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*. Chicago, 1997, 53–4.

<sup>33</sup> Max Weber, 'The Nature of City,' in *Classic Essays on the Culture of the Cities* (ed. Richard Sennett). New York, 1969, 23.



cosmopolite was divided in relation to himself; he did not engage to a single viewpoint or identity but observed the world from many different role positions.

The Chicago School sociologist Robert Park has used the term ‘the marginal man’ to characterize the big city cosmopolite. The term ‘marginal’ did not denote marginalization as a social isolation but illustrates the division of the identity produced by the metropolitan experience. Moving to a big city broke the whole of the traditional customs and values in the social level as well as in the consciousness of an individual, and the marginal man became the citizen of the two worlds: the original cultural and social context and the mixed urban reality; in Park’s words, ‘the “cake of custom” was broken and the individual is freed for new enterprises and for new associations.’<sup>34</sup> The prize of freedom was ambivalence in proportion to the world and the self: ‘The effect is to produce an unstable character – a personality type with characteristic forms of behavior. This is the marginal man. It is in the mind of the marginal man that conflicting cultures meet and fuse.’<sup>35</sup> The citizenship of the two worlds causes the moral dichotomy which was the source of inner conflicts and mental instability, but the situation had a productive side, too: it meant the freedom of choice, mental mobility, possibilities to realize one’s individuality without the constraints of tradition. Like the fission reaction, breaking the tradition liberated new energies: ‘When the traditional organization of society breaks down, as a result of contact and collision with a new invading culture, the effect is, so to speak, to emancipate the individual man. Energies that formerly had been controlled by custom and tradition were released. The individual was free for new adventures, but he was more or less without direction and control.’<sup>36</sup>

It is unclear what Park and Weber exactly mean by the concept of individualism: does it mean a realization of one’s authentic inner self, or the creation of an artificial self – or selves? Should we understand metropolitan freedom as the freedom to realize one’s authentic self? Or as the freedom to fashion one’s self as an artificial entity, as the objet d’art? Both Park and especially many German historians and sociologists have had a kind of melancholy overtone when they write about the freedom of the modern city dweller. The prize of freedom was alienation, mental instability, and emotional loneliness, ‘mechanization’ of the human relations in big cities. Georg Simmel emphasized the defensive and non-emotional character of the metropolitan psychic structure: ‘the metropolitan type of man ... develops an organ protecting him against the threatening currents and discrepancies of his external environment which would uproot him. He reacts with his head instead of his heart. ... Intellectually is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life’.<sup>37</sup> That is

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Park, ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man,’ in *Classic Essays on the Culture of the Cities* (ed. Richard Sennett). New York, 1969, 131.

<sup>35</sup> Park 1969, 131.

<sup>36</sup> Park 1969, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in *Classic Essays on the Culture of the Cities* (ed. Richard Sennett). New York, 1969, 48.

to say, the human core should be sheltered from the multiple and chaotic impulses of the city by hardened cover which keeps emotional identification inside. However, it also possible to put the question of urban freedom in affirmative, active terms; as a freedom to create: to create one's own lifestyle, outlook and identity; and, besides, to act whimsically and break all the "rational" plans in the floating and multi faceted urban world.

One of the icons of modernism, Charles Baudelaire, wrote about the figure of the *flâneur* whose 'passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite.'<sup>38</sup> According to Keith Tester, '*flânerie* can be understood as the observation of the fleeting and the transitory', and this affirmation of transitoriness is in the core of the experience of modernity.<sup>39</sup> The *flâneur* was an observer but in a different sense than Addison and Steele's Spectator because the '*flânerie* urbanizes observation by making observer part of the urban scene', and so the '*flâneur* is observed while observing', Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson writes and emphasizes how the *flâneur* himself was an 'integral part of the urban spectacle'.<sup>40</sup> The *flâneur* accepted the multiplicity of the city with all its features and enjoyed it without any suspicion, and his identification with the city was strongly emotional, even ecstatic. Baudelaire's urban wanderer 'goes and watches the river of life flow past him in all its splendour and majesty. He marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities... he delights in universal life.'<sup>41</sup> Anonymity, instead of being a menace, was a positive force, and the *flâneur* 'is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. ... Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy.'<sup>42</sup> The urban existence had lost all its moral and political coordinates and changed to the pure aesthetic. The great commentator of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, sees the affirmation of the crowd and transitory nature of the city life as the kernel of the experience in the modern metropolis.

The aesthetical fashioning of the self was the second central component of dandyism. According to Théophile Gautier, also a dandy *par excellence*, Baudelaire's 'courtesy was often excessive to the point of affectation', and the poet punctiliously 'retained the outward forms of courtesy.'<sup>43</sup> 'British reserve appealed to his sense of good form', Gautier continued, and he noted that the 'principles of Brummel'

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of the Modern World and Other Essays* (transl. and ed. Jonathan Mayne). New York, 1995, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Keith Tester, 'Introduction', in *The Flâneur* (ed. Keith Tester). London and New York, 1994, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, 'The *flâneur* on and off the streets of Paris', in Tester 1994, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Baudelaire, *The Painter*, 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Théophile Gautier, *Charles Baudelaire: His Life* (transl. by Guy Thorne). London, 1915, 6, 12—13.

characterized Baudelaire's 'cult of self'.<sup>44</sup> 'We were in the big salon, decorated in the style of Louis XIV', Gautier characterized the milieu of their first meeting, and he illustrated enthusiastically the 'painted nymphs', 'a golden elephant' and 'the great marble chimney' of the setting where the friends experienced the 'ecstasies, dreams, hallucinations' generated by hash and other hallucinogens. The passion for extravagant luxury was a special interest of a *flâneur*; the seducing surface of things, a 'bizarre elegance, a capricious richness, striking fantasy' fascinated his 'excessive, singular anti-natural' taste.<sup>45</sup> The British dandyism of Beau Brummel and Lord Byron was a direct predecessor of this cult of self and ostentatious aestheticism, but already in Boswell we can recognize the crucial elements of *flânerie* and dandyism, especially in his aesthetical fashioning of his self for the urban scene, in his ecstatic identification with the crowd and the multiplicity of the city, and in his fascination with the spectacular elements of the metropolitan life.

### *The Spectacular City*

The idea of *theatrum mundi* is the point of departure in Richard Sennett's highly innovative although highly controversial study of the decline of the western public culture since the end of the eighteenth century. According to him, the metropolitan sociability of eighteenth-century London and Paris had a strongly theatrical character; the street and the stage reflected each other in this urban culture in which social encounters were understood in theatrical terms. In the core of this theatrical ethos was a new attitude towards strangers: while traditional communities (and modern segregated urban communities, too) dealt with strangers as outsiders or "aliens", as the beings fundamentally different than "us", the new theatrical code saw the strangers as the unknown, as the human beings about whom we have very limited personal knowledge but with whom we can communicate through the theatrical codes of sociability.<sup>46</sup>

The theatrical code made it possible to use the body as a mannequin, as a decorated object which communicated in the system of visibilities of the city like an artificially constructed theatrical figure. The use of masks and the dress of a "wrong" rank were elements in the mode of sociability which found social interchange as an artistic play, not as a disclosure of one's person or "unique" individuality.<sup>47</sup> Speech was seen as a 'sign', as a theatrical representation without reference to the speaker's private personality. Sennett uses 'coffee-house speech' as a paradigmatic example of anonymous, theatrical speech situation; in a coffee-house the clients could communicate

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<sup>44</sup> Gautier, *Baudelaire*, 6—7.

<sup>45</sup> Gautier, *Baudelaire*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Sennett 1978, 48—9, 109.

<sup>47</sup> Sennett 1978, 64—72.

about general topics within a sign system of meaning divorced from the symbols of meaning like rank or origins.<sup>48</sup> The anonymous and theatrical social space made possible a spontaneous and creative relation to the social situations: people could be communicative and enjoy each other's company behind the sheltering masks and roles.

The snake in the paradise was the introduction of the new conception of individual personality according to which the outer expressions had a direct connection to the unique core of one's personality; dress, speech and the other forms of outer behaviour were now seen as a manifestation of the inner self, not anymore as a freely chosen elements in a theatrical play. The *entrée* of the individual personality into the social stage made the social occasions complicated because people sought protection against "revelation" from uniformity and conformism. Recently some scholars have even called the egalitarian and anonymous nature of the coffee-house talk into question. According to Dustin Griffin, the anonymous 'public sphere' was, in the coffee-house context, more an idea than a social reality; more than a meeting place for 'all kinds and ranks', Griffin writes, the coffee-house was a 'clubby place where one might meet one's own kind and hear only opinions that reassuringly echoed one's own' and where usually some dominant person dictated the nature of the discussion.<sup>49</sup>

It is easy to see eighteenth-century British culture as a locale of confrontation between theatrical and anti-theatrical forces. On the one hand, the *theatrum mundi* idea – Addison wrote about the 'Fraternity of Spectators' which considered the world as a theatre<sup>50</sup> – and the notion of theatre as a school of conduct were widely spread in the contemporary consciousness, and the public amusements often had a highly theatrical character.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, the anti-theatrical ethos, which had received its first powerful manifestation in the Puritan revolution when the Calvinist divines 'derived their moral and intellectual authority from their relation to the divine Word', strengthened again during the eighteenth century, now in the form of the cult of authenticity and sincerity.<sup>52</sup> The new spirit manifested itself first in the field of poetry in the 1740s when, according to Gerald Newman, 'true poetic creativity, it was increasingly believed, emerged from the unmasking of personal feelings', and the requirement of sincerity spread into the realm of social relations.<sup>53</sup> The correspondence between words and thoughts was at the core of this requirement of plainness which had also a strongly anti-urban character: diarist Anna Larpent wrote how 'there is an emptiness, a lightness in all public places' of polite London, and how 'horrid is the life

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<sup>48</sup> Sennett 1978, 72–82.

<sup>49</sup> Dustin Griffin, 'The social world of authorship 1660–1714', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780* (ed. John Richetti). Cambridge, 2005, 52–4; see Brian Cowan, 'Mr. Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.3 (2004), 345–366.

<sup>50</sup> Brewer 1997, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture*. Cambridge, 2005, 116.

<sup>52</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, Mass., 1972.

<sup>53</sup> Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740–1830*. London, 1987.

of (too many) people of fashion, one might imagine that they forgot they had souls'.<sup>54</sup> The fear of losing one's soul was connected with notion that the theatrical play with masks on the scenes of modish London was destructive to one's authentic self. This Rousseauistic conception with its various formulations was becoming a dominant position until the end of the eighteenth century.

In a sense, the theatrical elements in eighteenth-century public life had their roots in early modern courtly and aristocratic culture. Display was a central component in courtly publicity; the dazzling appearance and material opulence were central elements in courtly spectacles, and this mechanism of making appearance spread to the urban institutions under the courtly influence like opera, theatre, the pedestrian park and the pleasure garden. City life has always been compared with the theatre but in the early modern period this metaphor was given two specific meanings. The city was a scene of different spectacles, but the theatrical effect was also connected with the composition of the city space; the city, its streets and squares with their calculated perspectives and surprising views were theatre as such. The Baroque can be seen as the age of illusion and visual influencing *par excellence*. The visual nature of the early modern city was first realized in a theatre staging painted by Sebastiano Serlio, not in a real city. John Evelyn wrote about Paris which was built so beautifully that the city dweller could imagine that he moves in the staging of an Italian opera.<sup>55</sup>

Spectacular theatricality was a central component of court and city life of the early modern period; this concerned courtly festivals, theatre and especially opera as well as public life of streets and parks. The early-modern capitals and residential cities were planned for these purposes. This restructuring of the urban space was a part of a phenomenon which Jürgen Habermas calls the representative publicness and Lewis Mumford the social parade.<sup>56</sup> The terms refer to the forms of early modern court and urban culture, which aimed at emotionally effective public manifestation and their basic function was to strengthen the ideological power of an absolute monarchy and the Church. So in its elementary form this publicity was a kind of choreography of power, but it also had several aesthetic, intellectual, social, even erotic dimensions. The basic mechanism of this form of publicity was asymmetrical: the clerical and political power represented themselves to the passive, submissive and dazzled audience. These forms of public life were put under the critical consideration in the moral weeklies of Addison and Steele whose coffee-house milieu was a representative example of the bourgeois publicity, a new cultural formation which was characterized by egalitarian sociability, free change of critical opinions and the formation of the autonomous political subject.

'For Boswell's particular experience of the Town', Erik Bond writes, 'theatricality characterized this space'; theatrical display on the London scene and the reflections on

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<sup>54</sup> Brewer 1997, 70.

<sup>55</sup> Spiro Kostof, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*. London, 1991, 222-4.

<sup>56</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (transl. Thomas Burger). Cambridge, 2003.

the theatrical nature of the city were essential elements in Boswell's urban experience.<sup>57</sup> "Clubbable" Boswell has sometimes been considered as a typical figure of the milieu of the bourgeois publicity: he was an enthusiastic admirer of *The Spectator*, The Club was the centre of his London life and his closest social network was dominated by the men of letters of the London intellectual scene. However, I would argue that more than being a typical eighteenth-century coffee-house figure, Boswell's public person included two seemingly irreconcilable elements, the "early modern" and the "modern". On the one hand, he persistently tried to fashion his public appearance to the one of a splendid courtier – the theatrical display on the scenes of urban publicity was in his interest at least as much as the attendance at polite conversations in the clubs and coffee-houses – and as a spectator, he was dazzled by the magnificence of courts, the splendour of the sacral ceremony and the majesty of the Baroque architecture. In this sense he belonged to the world of the early modern representative publicness. But on the other hand, his urban experience comprised some confusingly "modern" elements: he was fascinated by the anonymous crowd, he affirmed enthusiastically the surge of sensations of the metropolis, and he fashioned his self against this multiplicity. London was, for Boswell, the site of freedom, freedom to fashion his own life and to realize his ideals of human existence. He was also a "modern" city dweller in the sense of *flânerie*; he was not a divided 'marginal man' as a tragic figure but as a many-faceted person who consciously fashioned his several urban identities. Life in the big city was, for him, a creative activity.

### *Politeness and Impoliteness*

According to Gerald Newman, the turning point in the British culture of politeness was in 1751 when the sentimental poet and essayist William Shenstone wrote that he would prefer the 'Laws of Sincerity' over the 'Rules of Politeness'.<sup>58</sup> Boswell lived in a milieu which was becoming hostile towards aristocratic forms of politeness; a symptomatic event was the so-called Chesterfield-controversy after the publication of *Letters to His Son* (1774) when their snobbery and acceptance of the theatrical dissimulation raised a reaction. Dr. Johnson's comment on the manners of the dancing-master and the morals of a whore was very typical.<sup>59</sup> According to Michèle Cohen, by the 1760s there was a shift in the discussions of politeness when the necessity of politeness began to be questioned and English plainness and unpolished integrity to be valued over polite and

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<sup>57</sup> Erik Bond, *Reading London: Urban Speculation and Imaginative Government in Eighteenth-Century Literature*. Columbus, OH, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Newman 1987, 132.

<sup>59</sup> Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England', in *English Masculinities 1660–1800* (ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen). London and New York, 1999, 44-61.

sophisticated behaviour.<sup>60</sup> Philip Carter agrees when he recognizes two successive although partly overlapping phases in the eighteenth-century British culture of politeness: when Locke, Addison and Steele had introduced a gentlemanly ideal in which the polite behaviour was the reflection of the inner moral qualities, the cult of sentiment injected the requirement of emotional sincerity and attachment to polite sociability. According to Carter, it was the emphasis on ‘communing with others’ emotions, rather than acting with good breeding, which most clearly distinguished sentimental from polite sociability’. Both interpretations were equally hostile towards the courtly systems of civility.<sup>61</sup>

The suspicion about the theatrical forms of politeness had a long history. ‘We cannot but be pleased with an Humane, Friendly, Civil Temper, where-ever we meet with it’, John Locke wrote in his *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693) and continued in the spirit of honesty and sincerity, ‘The Actions, which naturally flow from such a well-formed Mind, please us also, as the genuine Marks of it; and beings as it were natural Emanations from the Spirit and Disposition within, cannot but be easy and unconstrain’d.’<sup>62</sup> The true gentleman never lied, and in the course of the eighteenth century this was interpreted so that dissimulation in the social occasions was a kind of lying.

The critique towards politeness was aimed principally at the early modern aristocratic and courtly forms of politeness, which embraced theatrical dissimulation, the use of social masks and even flattery as well as hypocrisy as positive elements in the social interchange. The central intention in all forms of the culture of politeness was reciprocal pleasing, and the dominant form of politeness which dated back to Locke, Shaftesbury and Addison’s and Steele’s moral weeklies, saw the art of pleasing more as mutual benevolence than theatrical display. ‘The aim of politeness,’ writes John Brewer in his study of eighteenth-century British cultural history, ‘was to reach an accommodation with the complexities of modern life and to replace political zeal and religious bigotry with mutual tolerance and understanding’. Brewer and many recent scholars have emphasized the totalizing character of the new culture of politeness; ‘the language of politeness permeated every aspect of cultural life’, and the term ‘polite’ could be connected to any cultural formation which filled the certain standards of refinement and good taste.<sup>63</sup>

Lawrence E. Klein has emphasized the political dimension of the culture of politeness. ‘The English elite reconstructed itself in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries’, he writes in his study on the third Earl of Shaftesbury, and the new interpretation of politeness ‘helped to formulate the hegemony of the landed

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<sup>60</sup> Cohen 1999, 53—4.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Carter, ‘Polite ‘Persons’: Character, Biography and the Gentleman’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 333—54.

<sup>62</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (ed. John W. and Jean S. Yolton). Oxford, 1989.

<sup>63</sup> Brewer 1997, 100—2; Klein 1995, 362.



classes and their supporters, as religion was definitively subordinated to social and political discipline, as the royal court shrank in the cultural stature, and as metropolitan London took over in generating cultural values.’<sup>64</sup> Shaftesbury’s intention was to reflect the condition of ‘post-Church’ and ‘post-court’ cultural policy with strongly Whiggish emphasis.<sup>65</sup> Shaftesbury’s theory of politeness had a strong anti-court ethos: the ‘dazzle’ of the court distorted perception and misdirected cognition in moral matters, and the ‘Court-greatness and Politeness’, i.e. theatrical display which turned man’s attention to the deceitful instead of his inner reality, were contrary to a ‘true Relish and simplicity in Things or Manners’, he wrote in his unpublished notebooks.<sup>66</sup> According to Klein, the politeness in the form Shaftesbury introduced it would have become the dominant cultural paradigm in long eighteenth-century Britain.

Klein, John Pocock and Carter, for instance, have recognized a sharp rupture in social and cultural values in late seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Britain, and so they see the eighteenth-century culture of politeness as a new and relatively unique cultural formation. However, there are others who have emphasized continuities, paradoxes and the pluralism of interpretations instead of a total and uniform transformation. Helen Berry has recently questioned the whole idea of the “polite” century. She has emphasized the ‘fascination with *impolite* behaviour’ in the eighteenth-century coffee-house scene and the eclectic and frank character of the “polite” conversation.<sup>67</sup> In the eighteenth century, alongside the theory of politeness based on the Lockean conception of the ‘inward civility’ and the Enlightenment ideas of inborn benevolence and sympathy, there was a “cynical” tradition which had its origins in Jansenism and the philosophy of Pierre Nicole and Pierre Bayle and whose most prominent representative in England was Bernard Mandeville. This interpretation understood virtue as one of the artificial masks available to the fallen man in their pursuit of selfish interests, and then the difference between virtue and vice would have nothing to do with behaviour. So polite behaviour was only a mask of the egoistical man, and fashionable sociability was a kind of spectacle of marionettes.<sup>68</sup>

Mikko Tolonen has in his recent study connected David Hume to the Mandevillean tradition and he argues that, for Hume, self-liking and politeness were strongly linked to each other and good-breeding was an artificial virtue that required that we should avoid all signs and expressions of pride. Since politeness, according to Hume, was not something planted in the soul, it can only be cultivated by constant application of

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<sup>64</sup> Klein 1995, 362.

<sup>65</sup> Klein 1994, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Klein 1994, 94, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Helen Berry, ‘Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King’s Coffee House and the Significance of “flash talk”’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 11 (2001), 65–81.

<sup>68</sup> E. J. Hundert, ‘The European Enlightenment and the History of Self’, in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (ed. Roy Porter). London and New York, 1997, 74–7.



theatrical gestures. Interestingly Hume encouraged his fellow countrymen to observe and imitate the manners of the French.<sup>69</sup> This was highly symptomatic because the French dissimulation, theatricality and affectation were the main targets of the British satirists and moralists whose argumentation was based on the requirement of the correspondence between the inner moral qualities and the outward behaviour.

Many scholars have pointed up the break between the fundamentally urban eighteenth-century politeness and the former forms of courtly politeness. Conversely Anna Bryson has argued that the urban experience of the English gentry and nobility was highly important for the development of the codes of conduct, and, in the field of urban geography, the birth of new fashionable meeting places in London by the 1620s and 1630s anticipated the expansion of the new forms of urbanism after the Restoration.<sup>70</sup> An important part of this urbanization was the adaptation of the codes of the continental, mostly Italian culture of courtly politeness. The classical conduct books by Castiglione, Guazzo and Della Casa were translated into English many times, and they offered a model of theatrical social intercourse which accepted flattery and hypocrisy, dissimulation and splendid appearance as the crucial elements on the civil intercourse.<sup>71</sup>

Markku Peltonen has in his study of the duel in early modern England examined politeness and honour in the context of the peer group of relatively equal gentlemen. It was his exterior or appearance, above all, how a gentleman was regarded by his peers, Peltonen argues, and polite behaviour was thus a means to show one's honour and respect to another gentleman and one's respect was crucially hinged on other people's opinion. Flattery and dissimulation were strongly positive elements because, in the ceremonies, the words involved had lost their actual meaning and received a figurative one instead, and the avoidance of offense was a first priority in the honour group of the peers. The emphasis in civil courtesy was placed on the exterior, on *decorum*, and honest dissimulation was justified because social life took precedence over inner life.<sup>72</sup> The polite people of the *beau monde* were distinguished from the rest of the society not only by their extravagant behaviour and conversation but also by their equally extravagant consumption.<sup>73</sup>

According to my argument, Boswell belonged, with slightly diverging emphasizes, with Mandeville, Hume and Lord Chesterfield to the successors of early modern theatrical forms of politeness. In many ways, Boswell's stand was clear: first, he saw that *retenu*, the concealment of inner feelings, was a central component in civilized sociability, which was a contrary position to the cult of sincerity and authenticity;

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<sup>69</sup> Mikko Tolonen, *Self-love and self-liking in the moral and political philosophy of Bernard Mandeville and David Hume*. Helsinki, 2009, 263—6.

<sup>70</sup> Bryson 1998, 131, 61.

<sup>71</sup> Bryson 1998, 56.

<sup>72</sup> Peltonen 2003, 29—37.

<sup>73</sup> Peltonen 2003, 269, 299.

secondly, he found the disclosure of intimate feelings in social occasions as uncivil and disgusting; thirdly, Boswell's emphasis was, in his theory of politeness, strongly on *decorum*, on the aesthetical fashioning of the self in the scenes of urban and courtly sociability; fourthly, the aim of this self-fashioning was a creative theatrical expression in the context of polite sociability; and finally, he combined the libertine sexuality to his gentlemanly figure. Peter France recognizes three facets in the culture of politeness: First, the aspect of 'polish', politeness as an aesthetic activity which denotes to the polishing of a rough, untreated material into 'something smooth and agreeable to the touch and sight'. The second is the element of 'police' which includes the requirements of social order, self-control and the codes of social conformism; and the third is the dimension of the 'polis' which includes the free communication of the free citizens of the republic.<sup>74</sup> Boswell's theory of politeness was strongly dominated by the first element, the aesthetically motivated fashioning of the polite self. Boswell had adopted from the courtly politeness its aesthetical element, the 'polishing' of the public figure, without its political and philosophical implications.

The most perplexing feature of Boswell's gentlemanly self was his libertine sexuality. In the sixteenth century, the term libertine denoted heterodoxy, freethinking, and atheism, but it soon received also the meanings of debauchery, looseness of sexual conduct, and an attempt to construct a self on the basis of the passions; a Puritan writer called the London gallants 'epicures', 'atheists' and 'libertines'.<sup>75</sup> In France, the emphasis was on intellectual freethinking, but in England libertinism indicated more rakish sexual behaviour. According to Anna Bryson, Restoration libertinism had a strong anti-civil overtone, and this transgressive aspect manifested itself in boorish indecency and foppish affectation.<sup>76</sup> James Grantham Turner also refers to the so-called repressive hypothesis when he writes about Etherege, Wycherley and Rochester's 'merry gang' and 'mob of gentlemen'.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, the libertinage could be seen as a Rabelaisian carnivalesque, where the social norms turn upside down and fixed identities change into the play with masks.<sup>78</sup>

In his essay on Boswell's manliness, Carter argues that Boswell's understanding of manliness was realized in two distinct personality types: the stoic and the rakish libertine.<sup>79</sup> Undoubtedly these figures were part of his masculine identity, too, but I seek to argue that they were more the elements of his cultural identity as a seventeenth-century style aristocratic gentleman. The use of masks and wrong identities was a

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<sup>74</sup> Peter France, *Politeness and its Discontents. Problems in the French Classical Culture*. Cambridge, 1992, 55—67.

<sup>75</sup> Bryson 1998, 245—8.

<sup>76</sup> Bryson 1998, 246.

<sup>77</sup> James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London. Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630—1685*. Cambridge, 2002., 120.

<sup>78</sup> Turner 2002, 118—163.; Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. Stanford, CA, 1986, 38—40.

<sup>79</sup> Carter 1999, 114.

central element in the eighteenth-century libertinage; and Boswell was apparently thrilled when he wrote about his exploits as a blackguard or highwayman. Terry Castle, like Anna Bryson, emphasizes the transgressive dimension of debauchery when she writes that for Boswell and some others in ‘the Protean life of the city...disguise provided a much-desired emotional access to new sensual and ethical realms’.<sup>80</sup> I would say that it is difficult to recognize in Boswell any serious transgressive or anti-civil ethos; even his most absurd sexual adventures could be understood as a theatrical play with roles. In his case, there was more a question of imitation than of transgression. The rakish roles like ‘Sir John Brute’ or a ‘blackguard’ which Boswell faithfully imitated had recognizable models in the Restoration drama, literature and the low style narrative. Turner, for instance, has proved how Boswell used Rochester’s persona-poem *The Imperfect Enjoyment* as a model in his ‘blackguard’ adventures.<sup>81</sup> Boswell’s libertinage did not include the religious, political and philosophical dimensions of Restoration libertinism; he was strongly against all forms of religious free-thinking as well as materialist philosophical conceptions, and blasphemy would have been an abomination for him.<sup>82</sup> Instead his libertinism was a part of his theatrical appearance on the scenes of the metropolis – in this case on the scene which had a strictly limited number of spectators. Boswell had adapted the libertine “ideals” mostly from Restoration literature, and they were a reconcilable element in his aesthetically fashioned gentlemanly figure.

### *The Play with Selves*

In the English cultural sphere, the seventeenth century was a period of proliferation of autobiographical texts. The terms diary and journal had entered into common usage in the sixteenth century. In the subsequent centuries, *diary* denoted principally medical, meteorological or astronomical representations or texts concerning household keeping. The publishing of personal records was uncommon still in the eighteenth century – the diaries of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys were published in the first decades of the nineteenth century – and the published ones were mainly war or travel accounts.<sup>83</sup> A highly important self-reflective tradition in the British autobiography dates back to the confessional literature of the dissenters of the seventeenth century. It was didactic literature which aimed at the victory over suffering and the salvation of the soul after

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<sup>80</sup> Terry Castle, ‘The culture of travesty: sexuality and masquerade in eighteenth-century England’, in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter). Manchester, 198, 157.

<sup>81</sup> Turner 2002, 152, 224.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Margaret Stewart, ‘Boswell and the Infidels’, in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1964), 475—483.

<sup>83</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*. Baltimore and London, 1989, 24.

the spiritual crises. A diary was a recording of sins and feelings of guilt as well as a dialogue between a man and his Creator; autobiographical writing denoted the recording of a process leading to the salvation of the soul.<sup>84</sup> Gradually the search for God was substituted by the search for the self. In the context of the culture of sentiment and romanticism, autobiographical texts did not pursue the reconciliation between man and God, but dealt with the conflicts between the individual subject constituted in time and his or her socio-cultural milieu.

Politeness, good breeding and proper behaviour were highly important topics in the autobiographical self-reflections, and the public and the private were not at all the distant and separate spheres: 'Sociability both in and out of the house,' Amanda Vickery writes about Elizabeth Shackleton's diary, 'was evaluated in the same terms – terms derived from the courtesy tradition of civility and politeness'.<sup>85</sup> Although during the eighteenth century the private sphere strengthened, and the intimate and familiar life was put under the meticulous observation in literature, medicine, pedagogy and philosophy, the boundaries between the private, public and semi-public spheres were diffuse. A highly important element in this development was the birth of so called bourgeois subjectivity. Autobiographical writing had a privileged position in this process, and diaries and journals, memories and letters were the field in which the confrontation between the different interpretations of the self took place.

Boswell began his *London Journal* with a statement 'know thyself', but he could have begun it 'invent thyself'.<sup>86</sup> 'The fascinating result is that there are two identities in the journals', Boswell's biographer Martin writes, Boswell the observer and Boswell the doer. Martin continues, 'the vitality of the journals derives from the former, the identity that constantly searches for meaning in the experience of the latter.'<sup>87</sup> Boswell's journal and his other autobiographical texts can be seen as an instrument of self-knowledge, of course – his 'self-analysis is as skilful as Rousseau's',<sup>88</sup> Frederick A. Pottle noted – but at the same time, however, they were also a medium of self-fashioning; the journal was a mirror against which he reflected, estimated and corrected his several selves. Erik Bond reflects Boswell's project from the viewpoint of textual strategies; the textual production offered means to manage the confusion of identity in the polyphonic world of London. The *London Journal's* novelty, Bond writes, rises from the way Boswell turns 'textual strategies for regulating conduct onto himself.' Autobiographical writing aimed at calculated fashioning of the self: 'Boswell tailors techniques for self-government, judges his own experience, and finally represents this self-governing activity as a new, disciplined type of imagination.'<sup>89</sup> The journal, as Boswell wrote,

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<sup>84</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow). New York, 1984, 368—9.

<sup>85</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*. New Haven & London, 1998.

<sup>86</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal* (ed. Frederick A. Pottle). New York, 1950, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Martin 1999, 111.

<sup>88</sup> Pottle 1966, 88.

<sup>89</sup> Bond 2007, 154—5.

‘will give me a habit of application and improve my expression,’ and he continued, ‘if I should go wrong, it will assist me in resolutions of doing better’.<sup>90</sup>

Boswell’s project of self-fashioning had an exact localization: ‘London was, besides the scene of his self-knowledge, the site of his self-creation. In London,’ Hesketh Pearson writes, Boswell ‘noticed his chameleon-like quality, how his nature changed with his company, how he became boorish or refined, religious or profane, chivalrous or mean-spirited, intelligent or vulgar, in accordance with his social surroundings, and he was constantly telling himself to maintain a composed and genteel manner under all circumstances.’<sup>91</sup> Pottle agrees and writes that Boswell’s journal ‘was born of his almost enthusiastic notion of the felicity of London’.<sup>92</sup> Boswell’s self-reflection and self-creation were strongly connected with his urban milieu; he fashioned his selves against the multiplicity of people, sensations and external objects of London.

Boswell’s reflections on identity had some points of contact with contemporary philosophical themes, especially Hume’s reflections on the self and Smith’s theories of sympathy and the ‘impartial spectator’. ‘The possible doubleness and or splitting of personal identity surfaced in multiple eighteenth-century contexts, and was a defining feature of the *ancien régime* of identity’, Dror Wahrman writes when he compares Boswell’s notion of an actor’s double feeling with Adam Smith’s theories of sympathy and fellow-feelings and his notion of the ‘impartial spectator’.<sup>93</sup> The doubleness of personal identity allows us both to remain ourselves and to experience transference of identity at the same time, and, Wahrman argues, Boswell had the same unsolvable problem when he wrote about an actor who in ‘certain degree’ was a different character from his own.<sup>94</sup> David Daiches points out how far from ‘impartiality’ Boswell’s notion of spectatorship was, and he argues that Boswell’s partiality and subjective identification manifested in his ‘passionate identification with his clients and his inability to separate his role as legal representative from that of sympathizer and rescuer.’<sup>95</sup> Boswell ‘aimed to be the *partial* spectator, not in the sense that he imposed his own interests on those of his subject but that he wanted to take his subject’s part, to enter into him.’<sup>96</sup> Susan Manning denotes Hume’s famous description of the mind as a kind of theatre where ‘several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations’. According to her, this was a ‘potent metaphor’ for Boswell and an opportunity to dramatize himself as all the characters he most admired: the self could become an actor on a stage, observed and recorded by the stylist in the audience. Boswell’s ‘double

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<sup>90</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Hesketh Pearson, *Johnson and Boswell*. London, 1958, 113.

<sup>92</sup> Pottle 1966, 86.

<sup>93</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven, 2006, 174.

<sup>94</sup> Wahrman 2006, 175—6, 188.

<sup>95</sup> David Daiches, ‘Introduction’, in *New Light on Boswell* (ed. Greg Clingham). Cambridge, 1991, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Daiches 1991, 4.

feeling' could be seen as a situation in which the player at once enters his role fully and retains something of his own character as an observer.<sup>97</sup>

Felicity A. Nussbaum argues that, in Boswell's autobiographical texts, there was confusion about the conceptualizations of the self which were connected with the general cultural situation: in the late eighteenth century, the different versions of an essential self competed with a notion that 'identity is perpetually in flux'. On the one hand, Boswell's journals registered the fluctuating state of mind when they 'repeatedly articulate the notion that identity may be continually revised and remade'. But on the other hand, he seemed to suppose an essential self or "real character" which could be at odds with the roles demanded by a present social situation.<sup>98</sup> Boswell's "real" self was, according to Nussbaum, strongly connected with his masculine identity; masculinity was, for him, something stern and permanent, which differed from the menacing female fickleness. Boswell's autobiographical fashioning of the self oscillated between the pursuit of solid "manly" and socially respectable self and the constructed transitory social selves which could be "low" or effeminate.<sup>99</sup>

In Boswell's autobiographical texts, it is easy to recognize echoes from the philosophical discussions about the nature of the self, although usually in a highly concrete form. 'My state of mind,' he remarked in 1776 after he had read Hartley and Priestley's metaphysics, 'was continually trying to perceive my faculties operating as machinery', and he saw his mind in a very Heraclitean illumination: 'Man's continuation of existence is a flux of ideas in the same body, like the flux of a river in the same channel. Even our bodies are perpetually changing. What then is the subject of praise or blame upon the whole? what of love or hatred when we are to contemplate a character?' he asked and tried to convince himself that 'there *must* be *something*, which we understand by a *spirit* or a *soul*, which is permanent'. But after all, scepticism remained as the dominant mood: 'And yet I must own that except the sense or perception of identity, I cannot say that there any sameness in my soul now and in my soul twenty years ago, or surely none thirty years ago.'<sup>100</sup> Boswell could not fully share Berkeley's and Hume's scepticism when 'they annihilate the substance and power both of body and mind'.<sup>101</sup> But his critical intelligence and, after all, his creative intentions supported the idea of plurality and malleability of the self: 'We may be in some degree whatever character we choose',<sup>102</sup> he wrote in his journal.

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<sup>97</sup> Susan Manning, "'This Philosophical Melancholy': Style and Self in Boswell and Hume', in *New Light on Boswell* (ed. Greg Clingham). Cambridge, 1991, 131.

<sup>98</sup> Nussbaum 1989, 107—112.

<sup>99</sup> Nussbaum 1989, 112—115.

<sup>100</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774—1776* (ed. Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle). London, 1963, 212.

<sup>101</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell: Laird of Auchinleck, 1778—1782*. (ed. C. M. Weiss and Frederick A. Pottle). New York, 1973, 252.

<sup>102</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 47.

In his journal in 1768, Boswell developed his idea of the plurality of the self through the metaphor of a lodging house. He compared his situation to the lodging house with the state of affairs some years earlier when his mind was ‘quite a lodging-house for all ideas who chose to put up there’ and so his mind was ‘at the mercy of accident’ because he had not a fixed mind of his own.<sup>103</sup> But at the present moment, the mind had changed, now it was a real house ‘where, though the street rooms and the upper floors are open to strangers, yet there is always a settled family in the back parlour and sleeping-closet behind it; and this family can judge the ideas which come to lodge.’ Boswell recalled how different people had spent shorter or longer time in the lodging-house: there had been ‘gentlemen of law’ but after all there had been ‘divines of all sorts’ who had caused anguish and melancholy but they had also brought with themselves solemn ideas and strong sensations which had left permanent marks on the walls of the house. The deists spent there ‘a very short while’ and luckily so because ‘they, being sceptics, were perpetually alarming me with thoughts that my walls were made of clay and could not last’. Besides at times the house had been colonized by the people of lesser spiritual ambitions, namely ‘by women of the town, and by some ladies of abandoned manners’.<sup>104</sup>

Boswell seems to recognize his mind as a plural entity; the mind or self had been composed of heterogeneous elements but the mind could develop and solidify. The idea of development and creation is present in a remark from the year 1776 in which Boswell compared a man with a beehive: ‘A curious thought came into my head on the great question of *soul*...I imagined that man is born with a *body* like a *hive*, and that the *soul* is the *honey* which is made in it. That by cultivation, particularly piety, *spirit* is increased. ... But what is the *bee* – the acting principle?’<sup>105</sup> Philosophically Boswell’s “theory of mind” was not very elegant – the relation of the constant “core” self to the transitory self-constructions was far from clear – but it reflected his creative intentions towards the self: self or selves were something he could actively fashion.

Many scholars have examined Boswell’s literary experiments with self-positions. He used such literary or fictive figures as Addison and Steele, Mr. Spectator and Macheath, as models through which he tested his self-constructions. According to some psychologically oriented scholars, they were fictive personalities, substitutes, which had been born when Boswell the child ‘unconsciously appropriated the personality traits of fictionalized writers, then eventually tried to realize this invented self’<sup>106</sup>, or when his ‘endlessly changing exterior self’ has been understood as a ‘compulsive reaction against the authoritarian demands he made on himself in search of an illusory “strong inner core

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<sup>103</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell in Search of a Wife, 1766--1769* (ed. Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle), London, 1957, 147.

<sup>104</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 147—8.

<sup>105</sup> Boswell, *The Ominous Years*, 236.

<sup>106</sup> Donald J. Newman, ‘James Boswell, Joseph Addison, and the Spectator in the Mirror’, in Donald J. Newman (ed.), *James Boswell: Psychological Interpretations*. New York, 1995, 2.



of identity” that sounds more like his father’s voice, or perhaps the voice of his mother’s stern Calvinist God.<sup>107</sup>

From the perspective of this study, I have found more prolific the interpretations which have emphasized the role of imagination and free creation in Boswell’s working on identities. Patricia Mayer Spacks focuses on the role of imagination in Boswell’s autobiographical self-creation, on the relation between imagination and living: ‘Boswell’s record achieves its intensity by its commitment to infinite personal possibility’.<sup>108</sup> She argues that to choose London as his residence had a highly stimulating effect on Boswell’s imagination; London would offer proper ideas and images but it provided a kind of talisman against the ‘frightful images’ which haunted him. According to Spacks, Boswell’s imagination, when working on his identity in the *London Journal*, oscillated between pleasure and prudence, when the former identified in certain degree with his real self and the latter with the ideal. The impossibility to realize the requirements of the prudent self to a kind of confusion, because the notion that that Boswell could fashion himself into a ‘combination of Addison, Steele, and the actor West Digges results from no reconciliation of imagination and reality. The young man seeks desperately outside himself for some image that he can internalize and fulfil.’<sup>109</sup> But finally, in the end of the *London Journal*, the hero of the autobiography learned to accept his divided identity and his restless fancy.<sup>110</sup>

According to John N. Morris, Boswell’s autobiographical writing was principally an aesthetic project: ‘Boswell’s interest in his states of mind, his insistence on cultivating in himself the feeling “proper” to a place or social situation, his sometimes-absurd “feudal” notions of the family, his impulse to try on the personalities of the villainous and the obscure’ all declared him to be a ‘person who regards experience as *material*, material out of which the will may shape a life conceived of as a work of art’.<sup>111</sup> Boswell’s ‘aesthetic intention’ with social experience was, Morris argues, a secular version of the earlier dissenter diarist’s ‘attempts to shape and save their souls’. Boswell’s intense way of examining his ‘minute-by-minute content of consciousness’, or, as he stated it, ‘the ‘faithful register of my variations of mind’, was very similar with the dissenter religious introspection.<sup>112</sup> Another aspect of Boswell’s autobiography was his identification with fictive and non-fictive figures. The principal aim of both self-examination and experimental identifications was the enlarging of himself, the intention to ‘incorporate within himself as many kinds of experience as possible’. The autobiographical writing was a medium of self-creation, and in this creative activity

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<sup>107</sup> Elaine Perez Zickler, *Boswell’s London Journal: Binding a Life*, in Donald J. Newman (ed.), *James Boswell: Psychological Interpretations*. New York, 1995, 35.

<sup>108</sup> Patricia Mayer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1976, 227—230.

<sup>109</sup> Spacks 1976, 233—240.

<sup>110</sup> Spacks 1976, 241—2.

<sup>111</sup> John N. Morris, *Versions of the Self*. New York/London, 1966, 171.

<sup>112</sup> Morris 1966, 171—8. 190.



Boswell had an ‘aesthetic end in view’; his life as it was recorded in his autobiographical texts was a ‘work of willed, deliberate, if defective, art’.<sup>113</sup>

Imagination was a crucial element in this aesthetic intention. ‘Boswell is fascinated by the powers of the human mind to alter or create new realities for itself through the dynamics of imagination’, Ronald Primeau writes in his article on Boswell’s romantic imagination.<sup>114</sup> According to him, the *London Journal* came close to the ‘many eighteenth-century aesthetic tracts on the pleasures of the imagination and the workings of fancy in the mind’s creative powers.’<sup>115</sup> Brian Evenson emphasizes how ‘Boswell postulates himself as a fluid character, as one who varies according to the choices he makes. He identifies himself in turn as a man of pleasure, as Hamlet, Macheath, the Laird of Auchinleck, a combination of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and West Digges or whomever else a situation seems to fit’, and, according to him, when Boswell classified his actions, he established grounds for ‘temporary, alternative selves.’<sup>116</sup> Autobiographical writing served as the material both for ‘the suspension of the old self and for the creation of new notions of the self’. This kind of writing was ‘an unravelling and re-creation of the self’ and so, Evenson argues, ‘of all eighteenth-century writers, Boswell seems most aware of the power writing has to question the self and open new options to the individual.’<sup>117</sup> Similarly, I would see Boswell’s Addison, Mr. Spectator, Macheath and other literary figures, fictional or non-fictional, as a material for the creative fashioning of the identity; in one level, Boswell’s autobiographical writing could be understood as a series of identity experiments, theatrical positions, and the real, fictional and semi-fictional literary figures were material of which Boswell fashioned his public identities.

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<sup>113</sup> Morris 1966, 206—210.

<sup>114</sup> Ronald Primeau, ‘Boswell’s ”Romantic Imagination” in the *London Journal*’, in *London Journal* 1973, vol. 9 (1), pp 13-27., 19.

<sup>115</sup> Primeau 1973, 19.

<sup>116</sup> Brian Evenson, ‘Boswell’s Grand Tour of Selves’, in Donald J. Newman (ed.), *James Boswell: Psychological Interpretations*. New York, 1995, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Evenson 1995, 72.

# I PERMANENCE AND TRANSITORINESS

‘There is a city called London, for which I have as violent an affection, as the most romantic lover ever had for his mistress,’<sup>118</sup> Boswell wrote to his friend Andrew Erskine on May 4, 1762. From his youth, Boswell had a highly romantic attitude towards metropolitan life style; London was the magical centre of his universe. The essence of Boswell’s London could be summed up in some crucial terms: multiplicity, variety, civility, elegance, whimsicality. For Boswell, civilization in its highest forms was a complex and multiple phenomenon; sophistication and the pursuit of elegance were the distinctive marks of the developed civilization; and finally, life in the urbane civilization required a special kind of sensibility: subtle imagination, susceptibility to the finest sensations and emotions, and the sense of the transitory nature of life. The big city was the scene of civilized life, and, in Boswell’s imagination, London was The Metropolis, the concrete image of the civilization.

In this chapter, I will argue that, for Boswell, city and countryside, or periphery in general, developed into metaphors of two different understandings of the civilization. On the one hand, countryside referred to constant, permanent and uncultivated life forms, to the weight of tradition and to uniform and unambiguous interpretations of the world. City, on the other hand, represented elegance and sophistication, but above all, it was the seat of whim and fancy, the realm of transitory sensations and multiple life forms. However, the picture becomes complicated because of Boswell’s affective attitude towards his “feudal” family background and the archaic past of Scotland. The eighteenth-century British countryside had also the dimension of the aesthetic cultivation of nature, the landscape gardening which was an intensely discussed topic in the contemporary aesthetics, and in this chapter, I will also deal with the relation of garden aesthetics to Boswell’s urban experience.

City has always been limited by a non-city; by something alien to urban civilization: nature, countryside, savagery, provincialism, archaic forms of social and economic organization. Boswell wrote to Erskine on April 22, 1762:

I have not at any time been more insipid, more muddy, and more standing – water like than I am just now. The country is my aversion. It renders me quite torpid. Were you here just now, you would behold your vivacious friend a most stupid exhibition. It is very surprising that the country should affect me so; whether it be that the scenes to be met with there, fall infinitely short of

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<sup>118</sup> James Boswell, *Letters Between the Honourable Andrew Erskine, and James Boswell, Esq.* London, 1763,101.

my ideas of pastoral simplicity; or that I have acquired so strong a relish for the variety and hurry of town life, as to languish in the stillness of retirement; or that the atmosphere is too moist and heavy.<sup>119</sup>

Boswell repeatedly crystallized his ethos by entertaining statements. A company was dining at Piccadilly: ‘We dined in a room on the third floor,’ the aged Boswell remarked in his journal, ‘commanding a view of the Green Park, St. James’s Park, the Queen’s House, Westminster Abbey, the Surrey hills, etc. I said I never before had dined in a room with such a prospect, and I exclaimed, “How delightful is to see the country and be sure you are not in it, Piccadilly is between us and it!”’<sup>120</sup> Boswell and Johnson sauntered in Greenwich Park: ‘He [Dr Johnson] asked me I suppose, by way of trying my disposition, “Is not this very fine?” Having no exquisite relish of the beauties of Nature, and being more delighted with “the busy hum of men,” I answered, “Yes, Sir; but not equal to Fleet Street.” JOHNSON. “You are right, Sir.”’<sup>121</sup> Boswell concluded that Covent Garden was the best garden in the world.<sup>122</sup> In Boswell’s days, this highly urbanized “garden” was notorious for its demimonde and licentious lifestyle.

### *The Nostalgic Landscape*

Anti-urbanism was a strengthening trend in eighteenth-century British culture – in spite of the opposite socioeconomic development. In contemporary imagery, especially in the second half of the century, rural periphery, archaic forms of life, and wild nature received a moral superiority in compared with urban and highly civilized modes of culture.<sup>123</sup> John Langhorne’s poem *The Country Justice* (1774–5) was a paradigmatic example of the anti-aristocratic and anti-urban ethos of the pre-Romantic literature. The poem had a long historical perspective. Originally, the Britons had lost their natural rights and liberties when the Saxon, Danish and Norman conquerors created the feudal system.<sup>124</sup> However, still later, in medieval feudal society, the nobles might defend the country, dispense justice and take care of their inferiors.<sup>125</sup> More recently, the urbanized and commercialized aristocracy had lost all its sense of social justice and as consequence beggary had increased, judiciary had corrupted, and, after all, foreign

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<sup>119</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 88-9.

<sup>120</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell: The Great Biographer* (ed. Marlies K. Danziger and Frank Brady). London, 1989, 98.

<sup>121</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, Volume one (ed. Ernst Rhys). London, 1946, 285.

<sup>122</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell: The English Experiment, 1785–1789* (ed. Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle). London, 1986, 83.

<sup>123</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England*. London, 1983, 260.

<sup>124</sup> John Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part I. London, 1774; 7–9; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. London, 1973, 79.

<sup>125</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part I, 7–9.

fashions had collapsed the manners and moral of the new aristocracy. The cosmopolitan nobility had transformed the traditional English countryside along the foreign fashions.

Langhorne had a strongly Rousseauistic view of the natural state of liberty, and the reference to the Corsican rebel underlined this point: 'Ask on their Mountains yon deserted band,/That point to PAOLI with no plausible hand ;/Despising still, their freeborn Souls unbroke,/ Alike the *Gallic* and *Ligurian* yoke!'<sup>126</sup> The rebellion for the independence of Corsica led by charismatic Pasquale Paoli had ended in defeat in 1770. The simple mountaineers' fight for independence against France and Genoa had raised a romantic enthusiasm for the "original" liberty in the republic of letters of Europe. Rousseau, for instance, was a prominent defender of the Corsicans. So was Boswell, too, but his motives were different: first and foremost, Boswell's romantic imagination, not fully immune to hero-worship, recognized "illustrious Paoli", besides as a superb political leader, as a perfect example of a gallant and fashionable gentleman: Paoli 'attracted the attention of every body. His carriage and deportment prejudiced them in his favour,' wrote Boswell enthusiastically, and he continued how Paoli's 'superiour judgment, and patriotic spirit, displayed with all the force of eloquence, charmed their understandings. All this, heightened with condescension, affability and modesty, entirely won him their hearts.'<sup>127</sup> While Boswell found his 'highest idea realized in Paoli',<sup>128</sup> and liked to see the Corsican leader 'in the midst of his heroic nobles',<sup>129</sup> Langhorne's poem had a strongly anti-aristocratic ethos. He associated Corsica with Britain where the new aristocracy had destroyed the ancient peasant liberties and transformed the traditional landscape along foreign models. The times of old age hospitality 'when WEALTH was Virtue's Handmaid' had gone because the new style lords did not care and protect their tenants.<sup>130</sup> In ancient times, when '...thy good Father held this wide Domain,/ The Voice of Sorrow never mourn'd in vain' the nobles took the paternalist responsibility for their inferiors but now they had identified with the cosmopolitan society of courts and cities and become estranged from their inherited milieu and landscape: 'Lost are those days, and FASHION's boundless Sway/ Has borne the Guardian Magistrate away./ Save in AUGUSTA's Streets, on Gallia's Shore,/ The Rural Patron is beheld no more.'<sup>131</sup> The neoclassical London, Augusta was the seat imported fashions which were hostile to traditional Anglo-Saxon manners and values.

The modern life style which had fatally alienated from Nature crystallized in the big city. In the core of this process was the decadence of masculinity: 'O, from each Title Folly ever took,/ Blood! Maccarone! Cicisbeo! or Rook!'<sup>132</sup> The extravagance of

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<sup>126</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part I, 8.

<sup>127</sup> James Boswell, *An account of Corsica, the journal of a tour to that island, and memoirs of Pasqual Paoli*. London, 1769, 127.

<sup>128</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 330.

<sup>129</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 305.

<sup>130</sup> John Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II. London, 1775, 18–19.

<sup>131</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 19.

<sup>132</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 22.

the fashionable world and the filthy underworld were secretly connected: both had lost the ancient natural sense of reason and moral: ‘From each low Passion, from each low resort,/ The thieving Alley, nay, the righteous Court, /From BERTIE’s, ALMACK’s, ARTHUR’s, and the Nest/ Where JUDAH’s Ferrets earth with CHARLES unblest; –/ From these and all the Garbage of the great, /At Honour’s, Freedom’s, Virtue’s Call – retreat!’<sup>133</sup> The ‘retreat’ of the moral sense in the courts, cities and other seats of fashionable life radiated to the countryside and had the disastrous consequences in the country life and the country landscape. ‘What has the *modern Man of Fashion less?*/ Does He, perchance, to rural Scenes repair,/ And “waste his Sweetness” on the effici’d Air,’<sup>134</sup> asked the poet ominously. The new aristocracy had replaced the naturally grown landscape by artificial imitation of foreign styles. The unnatural ideals had created an unnatural milieu: ‘Ye royal Architects, whose antic Taste,/ Would lay the Realms of Sense and Nature waste.’<sup>135</sup> In the ideal landscape, beauty came from the understanding of the natural order of things, not from the over-civilized and artificial aesthetic: ‘Superior bare the Scene in every Part!/ Here reigns great Nature, and there little Art!/ Here let thy life assume a nobler Plan,/To Nature Faithful, and the Friend of Man!’<sup>136</sup> Contrary to Augustan culture and especially seventeenth-century French Classicism, the Age of Sensibility found the relation between “Nature” and civilization highly problematic; the former referred to, besides wild nature, archaic and collective forms of human society which were supposed to be more authentic and closer to the natural state of human existence than artificial, complex and polyphonic life forms of the city.

The notion of the moral superiority of uncultivated nature and traditional countryside over highly civilized forms of culture was quite a popular attitude in mid- and late eighteenth-century British culture. The companion of this opinion was a reserved approach to Continental, especially French and Italian, cultural influence. It is important to notice that even so urban an author as Henry Fielding shared this opinion. In the beginning of *Tom Jones*, the writer compared reading with dining: ‘In like manner, we shall represent Human Nature at first to the keen appetite of our reader, in that more plain and simple manner in which it is found in the country, and shall hereafter hash and ragoos it with all the high French and Italian seasoning of affectation and vice which courts and cities afford.’<sup>137</sup> Fielding drew an analogy between the moral qualities of a character and the milieu in which he lived: ‘The Gothic stile of building could produce nothing nobler than Mr Allworthy’s house. There was an air of grandeur in it, that struck you with awe, and rival’d the beauties of the best Grecian architecture; and it was as commodious within, as venerable without.’<sup>138</sup> The writer hinted that the

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<sup>133</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 22.

<sup>134</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 20.

<sup>135</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 12.

<sup>136</sup> Langhorne, *The Country Justice*, part II, 24.

<sup>137</sup> Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones* (ed. R. P. C. Mutter). Harmondsworth, 1981, 53.

<sup>138</sup> Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 58.

old-fashioned aesthetic of Mr Allworthy's house embodied deeper inner qualities than fashionable Greek or Roman styles, whose brilliance was superficial by nature.

Fielding moved to Mr. Allworthy's garden which included strong moral implications, too: 'and forming a constant cascade of about thirty foot, not carried down a regular flight of steps, but tumbling in a natural fall over the broken and mossy stones'.<sup>139</sup> The author made us understand that the nature left in the free state of things manifested naturally grown virtues, and, on the other hand, over-civilized nature was a symptom of morally corrupted culture: 'The left hand scene presented a the view of very fine park, composed of very unequal ground, and agreeably varied with all diversity that hills, lawns, wood and water laid out with admirable taste, but owing less to art than to nature, could give.'<sup>140</sup> Irregularity received a positive meaning whereas aesthetic refining of nature was seen as doubtful activity. But what kind of person lived in this Arcadian milieu? Mr Allworthy was 'a human being replete with benevolence, meditating in what manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most good to his creatures.'<sup>141</sup> Mr Allworthy's morally healthy microcosm reflected his freely grown environment, and in reverse.

Oliver Goldsmith, a member of Dr Johnson's inner circle, framed a similar arrangement in his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766): 'The place of our retreat was a little neighbourhood, consisting of farmers, who tilled their own grounds, and were equal strangers to opulence and poverty. As they had almost all the conveniences of life within themselves, they seldom visited towns or cities in search of superfluities.' The distinction between artificiality of the city and naturalness and "honesty" of the countryside was clear, and the author referred critically to the urban culture of politeness: 'Remote from the polite, they still retained the primaeval simplicity of manners, and frugal by habit, they scarcely knew that temperance was a virtue.'<sup>142</sup> The most well known example of the ruinous impact of polite culture on the traditional rural form of life was the poem *The Deserted Village* (1770) by Goldsmith. The melancholy yearning for the lost harmony gives a tone to the poem, and the central theme is the contrast between luxury and happiness. The lost idyll was sketched by an Arcadian scene of childhood in the beginning of the poem:

Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,  
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,  
How often have I loiter'd o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endear'd each scene!<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 59.

<sup>141</sup> Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 59.

<sup>142</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, *Poetical and Prose Works*. London, 1910, 206.

<sup>143</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, 17.

Besides the archetypal vision of an Arcadian childhood, the poem referred to the real historical processes: the enclosure of open fields was a highly controversial topic in contemporary debates. Enclosures made it possible to build large elaborately designed landscape gardens which had mainly aesthetic and recreational functions. According to Nicholas Cooper, ‘while the culture of the class evolved as a corollary of its wealth and responsibilities, its expression in the country house paralleled other displays of manners in advertising the possessors’ education, refinement and social distinction.’<sup>144</sup> Built and planted environment developed into an image of a cultural ideal; house and garden were ‘not only the scene where ideals of gentility and manners could be realized: it provided an essential display of gentility in itself.’<sup>145</sup> Goldsmith continued how the pursuit of luxury had transformed the space full of convivial bustle and productive activities to the scene of vain ostentation.

(...) The man of wealth and pride  
 Takes up a space that many poor supplied;  
 Space for his lake, his park’s extended bounds,  
 Space for horses, equipage, and hounds;  
 (...)  
 For all the luxuries the world supplies,  
 While thus the land, adorn’d for pleasure all,  
 In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.<sup>146</sup>

In the poem the age old conception of moral superiority of archaic peasantry has been merged with the new pre-Romantic sensibility. It should be emphasized that Fielding’s as well as Goldsmith’s sphere of life was highly urban; London theatres, coffee-houses and drawing rooms were their milieu, and both belonged to the inner circles of literary society of London.

### *Feudal Fancies*

The young Boswell was not fully immune to the early romantic cult of nature. The foggy Scottish romanticism had a certain impact on him, and James Thomson influenced his first efforts as a poet.<sup>147</sup> In 1781, as a middle-aged man he wrote about how strong an experience Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742) had been in his youth: ‘I had much internal satisfaction at Young’s, thinking that I was actually in the garden of the author of *Night Thoughts*, which made such an impression on my mind in

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<sup>144</sup> Nicholas Cooper, ‘Ranks, Manners and Display: The Gentlemanly House, 1500—1750’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 291.

<sup>145</sup> Cooper 2002, 291.

<sup>146</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, 23.

<sup>147</sup> Pottle 1966, 59-61.



early life.’<sup>148</sup> In 1762, in his early twenties Boswell was leaving Scotland for London: ‘I next stood in the court before the Palace [Holyroodhouse], and bowed thrice to Arthur’s Seat,’ he noted in his journal, ‘that lofty romantic mountain on which I have so often stayed in my days of youth, indulged meditation and felt the raptures of a soul filled with ideas of the magnificence of God and his creation.’<sup>149</sup> In the contemporary context, the term romantic associated with wild and rugged landscape; according to Johnson’s dictionary, *romantick* means: ‘1 Resembling the tales of romances; wild 2 Improbable; false. 3 Fanciful; full of wild scenery.’<sup>150</sup>

Boswell was, in his own words, a ‘man of fancy and whim’ in his relation to the world. Especially in his early years, Boswell now and then used term romantic in its conventional sense referring to wilderness, medieval structures or gloomy scenes.<sup>151</sup> He was born into an ancient and respected Ayrshire family, and the family seat Auchinleck with its more than 20,000 acres ‘inspired virtually all of Scottish pride’.<sup>152</sup> In a letter to Dr. Johnson he wrote about a ‘romantick family solemnity’ in the ‘old castle of Auchinleck’.<sup>153</sup> In *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) the author was delighted when the older travelling companion spoke of the ‘sullen dignity of the old castle’ when he saw the ruins of Auchinleck, about which Boswell wrote that he ‘cannot figure a more romantick scene’.<sup>154</sup> In *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) he had wild fancies of the feudal past of his noble family, and he reminded Dr. Johnson that he had ‘old feudal principles to a degree of enthusiasm’ and these ‘feudal’ reveries focused on the family estate where ‘the Laird of Auchinleck had an elegant house, in front of which he could ride ten miles upon his own territories, upon which he had upwards of six hundred people attached to him’. The imagery of the family past had strongly connected with the local landscape which was ‘rich in natural, romantick beauties of rock, wood, and water’ and which was associated with ‘certain scenes’ of Ancient classics read in the ‘morn of life’.<sup>155</sup>

Boswell’s feudal fantasies received unintentionally comical tone when he recognized an irreconcilable conflict between his ‘old male feudal principles’, according to which his wife and children should not have provisions of the family estate in the case of his death on the one hand, and his ‘sincere affection’ for wife and children on the other.<sup>156</sup> Sometimes Boswell stated opinions on the feudal social relations which

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<sup>148</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 373.

<sup>149</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 41-42.

<sup>150</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language. Vol. II. The Sixth Edition*. London, 1785, 528.

<sup>151</sup> Peter F. Perreten, ‘Boswell’s Response to the European Landscape’, in *Boswell – Citizen of the World, Man of Letters* (ed. Irma S. Lustig). Lexington, KY, 1995.

<sup>152</sup> Martin 1999, 25-6.

<sup>153</sup> James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, Vol. III. Dublin, 1792, 165.

<sup>154</sup> James Boswell, *The Journal of the Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* The second edition, revised and corrected. London, 1785, 478.

<sup>155</sup> Boswell, *The Life*, Vol. II. Dublin, 1792, 519-20.

<sup>156</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell for the Defence, 1769—1774* (ed. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Frederick A. Pottle). London, 1960, 245.



even Dr. Johnson found too conservative. 'I argued warmly for the old feudal system', he wrote in the diary in 1772, 'I maintained that ...the vassals or followers, were not unhappy; for that there was a reciprocal satisfaction between the lord and them: he being kind in authority over them; they being respectful and faithful to him.'<sup>157</sup> The tone was the same in the tour to the Hebrides. Boswell and Johnson were dining at Lord Erroll's, and Boswell was taken to defend the system of feudal dependencies. 'I said, I believed mankind were happier in the ancient feudal state of subordination, than they are in the modern state of independency'<sup>158</sup>, he argued and later he gave an example, 'I mentioned the happiness of the French in their subordination, by the reciprocal benevolence and attachment between the great and those in lower rank.'<sup>159</sup>

Boswell's 'feudal' ideas had a two-dimensional character. On the one hand, they were associated with the medieval code of lordship which included both the lord's paternal care of the tenants and their reciprocal expressions of subservience and loyalty. But, on the other hand, this medieval imagery was strongly mixed with code of urbanity, the gentlemanly milieu of early modern courts and other institutions of the fashionable sociability. In the urban context, the horizontal code of honour was much more important than the archaic vertical codes of rural feudalism.<sup>160</sup> This displacement implied two processes. First, in the courtly and urban context, the distance between aristocratic masters and their servants as well as other socially inferiors had grown, and the upper strata of the society lived in its exclusive milieu. Second, fashionable society had strongly expanded so the social encounters could not be based on the reciprocal familiarity and the exact knowledge of other person's rank and background. This new relatively anonymous milieu required new codes of behaviour as well as it created a new set of social values which differed crucially from that of the rural feudalism.

Despite his feudal fancies, the fashionable society of London and the Continent was Boswell's real object of longing, not the agrarian world of the 'Old Scottish Baron's'. The young Boswell had retired to the family estate Auchinleck. 'This charming weather, 'he wrote to Erskine on May 8, 1762, 'has reconciled me to the country. It enlivens me exceedingly. I am chearful and happy. I have been wandering by myself, all this forenoon, through the sweetest place in the world. The sunshine is mild, the breeze is gentle, my mind is peaceful. I am indulging the most agreeable reveries imaginable.'<sup>161</sup> The visions of rugged feudal countryside had gone and instead the tone is Arcadian and highly sensitive; the pre-Romantic sense of nature and the sensibility towards the nuances of emotions were manifest. But suddenly the stream of imagination took a strongly different direction. Without any transitional stage, Boswell's fancy moved from the Arcadian idyll to the shining world the court and the city: '[I am

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<sup>157</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 102.

<sup>158</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 112.

<sup>159</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 112.

<sup>160</sup> Bryson 1998, 113-5.

<sup>161</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 104.

thinking] how I shall be acquainted with all *grandeur of court*, and all *the elegance of dress and diversion*; become a favourite of ministers of state, and the adoration of ladies of quality, beauty, and fortune! How many parties of pleasure shall I have in town!’<sup>162</sup>

The pre-Romantic cult of the feudal past and the wild scenes of nature normally excluded the court and the city from its sphere of experience. The rural nostalgia and anti urbanism were commonly connected with xenophobic attitudes, too; especially ‘degenerated’ and effeminate French and Italian court culture and its indiscriminate British apes were the permanent target of sentimental moralists and Juvenalian satirists. Boswell’s vernal reverie continued in the same letter:

I am thinking of making the tour of Europe, and feasting on *the delicious prospects of Italy and France*; of feeling all the transports of a bard at Rome, and writing noble poems on the banks of the Tiber, I am thinking of the distinguished honours which I shall receive at *every foreign court*, and what infinite service I shall be to all my country-men upon their travels.<sup>163</sup>

Boswell combined the pre-Romantic sensibility with the enthusiastic affirmation of the court and the city. A man of sensibility could not live a meaningful life in the countryside because ‘animated intellectual pleasure must be sought in cities,’ he wrote in one of the essays named *On the Living on the Country* (1780). ‘That is,’ he continued, ‘amongst numbers of people assembled together, and having their powers and faculties excited by the vivifying motives of gain, ambition, emulation, and every thing else, by which we find man urged on to extraordinary exertions and attainments.’<sup>164</sup>

Although Boswell was proud of his ‘Old Scots’ ancestry as well as the subtle beauty of the Scottish landscape, it was clear that the role of a country gentleman did not fit the prospects he had imagined in his grandiose schemes. ‘But I do confess,’ he wrote in an essay on the living in the country, ‘it appears to me at present that a man cannot be happy in the country whose mind is not tolerably sedate, either naturally, or from having seen and enjoyed a great deal, and exhausted his curiosity and eager desires.’<sup>165</sup> The natural rhythm of agrarian society determined by the rotation of the seasons and the phases of work so idealized by Rousseauist contemporaries could not satisfy Boswell’s thirst for sensations, although ‘there is indeed in the country the variety of seasons to contemplate,’ he wrote in an essay on the living in the country, ‘but the circling years moves too slowly for him whose blood bounds with rapidity, and he is apt to grow impatient and fretful. ... Agriculture has much variety, but it is a sober variety.’<sup>166</sup> ‘A man of vivacity,’ Boswell introduced a highly crucial term in the essay,

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<sup>162</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 104 (it. MK).

<sup>163</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 105 (it. MK).

<sup>164</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell’s Column* (ed. Margery Bailey). London, 1951, 194.

<sup>165</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 199.

<sup>166</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 199.

‘unless his views are kept steady, by a golden prospect of gain, cannot long be pleased in looking at the operations of ploughing, dunging, harrowing, reaping, or threshing.’<sup>167</sup> Boswell used the expression the man of vivacity and equivalent formulations like ‘the man of fancy and whim’ or ‘the man of imagination and feeling’ again and again to characterize his uniquely sensitive and emotional relation to the world. In his diary in 1773, Boswell wondered how Dr. Johnson, ‘this great master of human nature should deny the power of action over reasonable beings’, and he stated as his own stance that ‘reasonable beings are not solely reasonable. They have fancies which must be amused, tastes which must be pleased, passions which must be roused.’<sup>168</sup> As such, this was a very Humean statement, but Boswell’s antirational ethos had some unique features.

Harold Tinker recognized a long time ago the two-faceted character of Boswell’s cultural orientation. He argued that Boswell had a Byronic longing out of the unimaginative and routine civilization for the magnificent spheres of fantasy, and he concluded that ‘however truly Boswell may be the exponent of the Age of Prose and its crowded life in salon and club, he was no less a child of the Romantic Movement. And he who does not realize that Boswell’s love of the civilization of his own time is for ever crossed and altered by strange yearnings after something larger, simpler, and more emotional has utterly failed to understand him.’<sup>169</sup> In so far as the romantic or Byronic element in Boswell’s character is concerned, Tinker is right, but I would argue that ‘the crowded life in salon and club’ as well as the crowded life in the court and the city were exactly same kind of material for Boswell’s imagination as raging seas, desolated heaths, ruined monasteries and deserted graveyards were for the main stream Romantics. The splendour of the fashionable world was the object of Boswell’s Byronic longing.

Dr Johnson, a confirmed Londoner (although a stern critic of the extravagant forms of the fashionable sociability), shared Boswell’s view of the countryside. When writing on pastoral poetry, he argued that the fascination is based on familiarity: the pleasure produced by the pastoral refers to the original state of humanity; and functions as an escape from the confused state of the world. But there was a snake in the paradise, uniformity. ‘The range of pastoral,’ Johnson wrote in *The Rambler*, ‘is indeed narrow for though nature itself, philosophically considered, be inexhaustible, yet its general effects on the eye and on the ear are uniform, and incapable of much variety of description.’<sup>170</sup> Multiplicity and variation, the prerequisite for the full flourish of human potentials, could not exist in the rural milieu. Johnson continued in the same essay:

Not only the images of rural life, but the occasions on which they can be properly produced, are few and general. The state of man confined to the

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<sup>167</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 199.

<sup>168</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 177.

<sup>169</sup> Tinker 1922, 180-1; see also Martin 2004, 27.

<sup>170</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, Vol. I. (ed. J. Warrington). London, 1953, 197.

employments and pleasures of the country, is so little diversified, and exposed to so few of those accidents which produce perplexities, terrors and surprises, in more complicated transactions, that he can be shewn but seldom in such circumstances as attract curiosity. His ambition is without policy, and his love without intrigue.<sup>171</sup>

Similarly Boswell used the uniformity–variety distinction to characterize the difference between the country and the city. Boswell visited Buddock in September 1792, and there he noticed that the ‘dampness of the climate and the want of variety of objects to engage and agitate, and a certain unfortunate association of melancholy with the country, especially about the fall of leaf, now affected me sadly’.<sup>172</sup> Invariability and the lack of sensations were associated with melancholy state of mind.

### *The Polite Garden*

Boswell’s relation to landscape could be divided into three components. The first was a sporadically occurring immediate ‘romantic’ identification with the Scottish landscape. The second referred to the intellectually reflected attitude towards cultivated landscape, and in this respect Lord Kames’s aesthetic theory was a highly important impulse. The third is connected with the Italian classical landscape.<sup>173</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames was one of the most prominent representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment; a literary gentleman whose books were read both in Britain and on the Continent. He wrote two important works on landscape aesthetic: *Elements of Criticism* (1762) and *The Gentleman Farmer: An Attempt to Improve Agriculture by Subjecting it to the Test of Rational Principles* (1776). Boswell belonged to Lord Kames’s intimate circle and received a lot of impulses from the older companion.

According to Peter F. Perreten, Boswell ‘seemed especially responsive to the innovative idea of raising a succession of emotions through the variety and arrangement of plantings.’<sup>174</sup> In an early remark, Lord Kames and a friend were surveying an estate when the young Boswell was reading and writing in the house. The situation made clear that ‘I have no sort of turn for farming, for it is a pity that a Being who will probably possess a part of earth should not know how to cultivate it.’ The sensations of city life were by far more tempting than monotonous though productive toil in the countryside: ‘Indeed I have lived so much in town, and have so high a relish in Society and other amusements, that my Attention has had little chance of being employed upon Ploughs

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<sup>171</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler*, Vol. I, 198.

<sup>172</sup> Boswell, *The Great Biographer*, 180.

<sup>173</sup> Perreten 1995, 37.

<sup>174</sup> Perreten 1995, 40; on Lord Kames’s relation to Boswell, see Richard B. Sher, “‘Something that Put Me in the Mind of My Father’: Boswell and Lord Kames’ in *Boswell – Citizen of the World, Man of Letters* (ed. Irma S. Lustig). Lexington, KY, 1995.

and Harrows.’<sup>175</sup> Traditional agriculture did not have the dimension of aesthetic pleasure which was of crucial importance for Boswell, but gardening was a different thing altogether: ‘But what I regret more is my want of taste for planting or gardening, which are really noble and elegant Employments’.<sup>176</sup> Gardening in its noble forms was the part of same aristocratic ‘aesthetic of existence’ like fine dress, magnificent architecture and polished outward behaviour.

Variety was a crucial term in Lord Kames’s philosophy of gardening, and this concept had an impact on Boswell’s reception of the landscape and especially the urban milieu. The central idea in Lord Kames was that a garden should produce different kind of emotions: joy and melancholy, surprises and amazement. This effect could be produced by the succession of divergent scenes.<sup>177</sup> According to him, ‘gardening, beside the emotions of beauty by means of regularity, order, proportion, colour, and utility, can raise emotions of grandeur, of sweetness, of gaiety, melancholy, wildness, and even of surprise or wonder.’<sup>178</sup> The succession of contradictory emotions was the core of the experience of a garden. In the right planned garden ‘the most opposite emotions, such as gloominess and gaiety, stillness and activity, follow each other in succession, the pleasure on the whole will be the greatest.’<sup>179</sup> The contradictory or dissimilar emotions should not appear simultaneously because this kind of uniting produced ‘an unpleasant mixture’.<sup>180</sup>

Kames applied his theory also to architecture. The architectonic experience should be organised following similar principles: ‘A great room, which enlarges the mind and gives a certain elevation to the spirits, is destined by nature for conversation.’<sup>181</sup> Kames kept in mind the requirements of polite sociability. In this context, architectonic spaces were above all public or semi-public spaces; they offered a scene especially for polite conversation but also for gallant sociability, political and economical intrigues and erotic games. Besides allowing a space for social activities, architecture, like garden, produced a spectrum of emotional effects. The succession of the rooms should lead from smaller to bigger rooms. And the feeling of grandeur is the noblest emotion produced by architecture because ‘grandeur is that which has the greatest influence on the mind. It ought therefore to be the chief study of the artist, to raise this emotion in great buildings’.<sup>182</sup> Kames’s architectural aesthetic was a kind of missing link between Kames’s theory of gardening and Boswell’s urban experience.

However, there was an important shift between Kames and Boswell; sometimes Boswell felt that eventually his whimsical and emotional attitude could not adjust to the

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<sup>175</sup> James Boswell, *Harvest Jaunt*, cit. Perreten 1995, 41.

<sup>176</sup> James Boswell, *Harvest Jaunt*, cit. Perreten 1995, 41.

<sup>177</sup> Perreten 1995 39—40.

<sup>178</sup> Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism*, Vol. III. Hildesheim, 1970 (1762), 296-7.

<sup>179</sup> Kames, *Elements* Vol. III, 302—3.

<sup>180</sup> Kames, *Elements* Vol. III, 302—3.

<sup>181</sup> Kames, *Elements* Vol. III, 341.

<sup>182</sup> Kames, *Elements* Vol. III, 342.

Kamesian reasoned calculation. In 1765 in Vado close to Genoa he recognized a curious church which he found highly pleasing although he knew that its design was far from respectable – it was made of green and blue stone, it was diversified ‘with figures of the Roman emperors, with St. George and the dragon, with the whimsical, fantastic zigzags which adorn the panels of a drawing-room, with terrible arms, or with elegant flowerpots’<sup>183</sup> – and the writer surmised that ‘Lord Kames and other cool analyzers of feeling’ would have found its plastering and painting system absurd.<sup>184</sup> But Boswell answered the imaginary opponent: “‘Very well argued, master metaphysician. But I cannot feel by reason, and therefore, when an object excites pleasure in me, I call it pleasing.’”<sup>185</sup> It is worth noting that Boswell raised emotional, whimsical and intuitive attitude towards reality to higher level than rational analysis – this was a very typical romantic position: feeling uncovered deeper truths than reason. The end of the remark was likewise remarkable; in fact Boswell found the lower forms aesthetic pleasure equally important as the noble ones, and the source of the aesthetic pleasure could be ‘a dance at Sadler’s Wells, a ballad sung by porters against the ministry, a roasted apple from a stand at Temple Bar, a Methodist sermon, or a print of the world turned upside down’.<sup>186</sup> So Boswell introduced a highly subjectivist aesthetic perspective: the individual experience was more decisive than the common norms.

A representative figure of the culture of sentiment was William Shenstone, a gardener and a man of letters. As a poet he was a post-Augustan sentimentalist. Besides Thomson, Shenstone was a model for young Boswell when he tried to become a lyricist.<sup>187</sup> ‘And yet, Erskine,’ he wrote to Erskine on August 25, 1761, ‘I must tell you that I have been a little pensive of late, amorously pensive, and disposed to read Shenstone’s Pastoral on Absence, the tenderness and simplicity of which I greatly admire.’<sup>188</sup> Shenstone also wrote several essays on various topics, and his essay on gardening is a classic of the genre. For Shenstone, garden was not only the object of aesthetic contemplation but a milieu where the most delicate forms of human personality and human sociability could grow freely. In a letter he reflected the basic conditions of agreeable sociability: ‘A polite & friendly Neighbourhood in *ye Country*, or, (in Lieu of that) agreeable visitants from *any Distance*, give a Person all *ye Society* he can extract from a Crowd; & then he has the *rural Scenery*, which is all *clear Gains*.’<sup>189</sup> ‘To extract from a crowd’ was a highly symptomatic expression because it made a distinction between an anonymous multitude of people in cities and an intimate

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<sup>183</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France, 1765–1766* (ed. Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle. London, 1955, 241.

<sup>184</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 241.

<sup>185</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 241

<sup>186</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 241.

<sup>187</sup> Pottle 1966, 59.

<sup>188</sup> James Boswell, *Letters of James Boswell to the Rev. W. J. Temple* (ed. Thomas Seccombe). London, 1908, 299.

<sup>189</sup> William Shenstone, *Letters* (ed. Duncan Mallam). Minneapolis, 1939, 91.

circle of friends in a familiar milieu. Friendship could be best achieved in a tranquil milieu in the countryside where strange and unexpected elements were excluded. Countryside was not only a physical milieu; it was a social and moral sphere of familiarity and intimacy. Shenstone seems to think that he represented a prevailing opinion: 'For I fancy no one will prefer ye Beauty of a *street* to ye Beauty of a Lawn or Grove; & indeed the Poets wou'd have form'd no very tempting an *Elysium*, had they made a *Town* of it.'<sup>190</sup>

Peter De Bolla has examined the history of seeing and identification based on the faculty of vision, the grammar of looking, in relation to English landscape garden. According to him, the reception of the parks changed crucially during the eighteenth century. He identifies two types of garden and two modalities of seeing connected with them. De Bolla calls the earlier type the emblematic garden. This kind of garden required a decoding gaze because the garden included cultural and historical allusions; the garden was impregnated with meanings derived from classical tradition, so the garden 'requires what I shall term the studious gaze; furthermore it demands that the looker is educated in a semi-private semantic and semiotic system, so that he or she might pick up specific references to a highly temporary (in the sense of it being relevant only to the lifetime of the framers of the allegorical system) set of coded meanings.'<sup>191</sup> Decoding the garden required classical education so the "right" reception was inevitably restricted to a cultural and social elite. According to De Bolla, this 'is a pervasive feature of Augustan modes of arts'.<sup>192</sup>

The second type of garden, the expressionistic garden, did not demand cultural capital but something which De Bolla calls a 'sentimental look'; this gaze did not decode emblems but wandered through the landscape 'registering incidents and contrasts, generating expectation, and delighting surprise. This garden typically contained aural as well as visual stimulation, which served to animate the viewer into a sequential experience of distinct sensations. Here visual experience had little to do with gleaning what is meant and all to do with emotive response of the looker.'<sup>193</sup> De Bolla uses Shenstone's reflections as an example of this new sensibility. The contemporary term "charm'd eye" illustrated the emotional relationship between a garden and its spectator. The central concepts in the new aesthetic culture were imagination, variety and novelty.<sup>194</sup>

In a very Kamesian way, the idea of the garden was, for Shenstone, to raise different states of mind. Imagination was a paramount term: 'Perhaps the division of the pleasures of imagination, according as they are struck by the great, the various, and

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<sup>190</sup> Shenstone, *Letters*, 91.

<sup>191</sup> Peter De Bolla, 'The Charm'd Eye', in *Body & Text the Eighteenth Century* (ed. Veronica Kelly and Dorothea von Mücke). Stanford, CA, 1994, 93.

<sup>192</sup> De Bolla 1994, 93-4.

<sup>193</sup> De Bolla 1994, 94.

<sup>194</sup> De Bolla 1994, 93—5.



beautiful, may be accurate enough for my present purpose.’<sup>195</sup> He was very explicit when he urged to avoiding a rational and distant relation to the garden: ‘Objects should indeed be less calculated to strike the immediate eye, than the judgement or well-formed imagination; as in painting.’<sup>196</sup> Shenstone introduced such central concepts, novelty and variety and, according to the latter, the balancing term uniformity. The concept novelty brought a relativistic aspect to Shenstone’s aesthetic; things were not beautiful or ugly as such but only in relation to each other: ‘Are there not broken rocks and rugged grounds, to which we can hardly attribute either beauty or grandeur; and yet when introduced near an extent of lawn, impart a pleasure equal to more shapely scenes?’<sup>197</sup> Variety was merged with the concept of novelty; ‘variety appears to me to derive good part of its effect from novelty; as the eye, passing from one form or colour, to a form or colour a different kind, finds a degree of novelty in its present object, which affords immediate satisfaction.’<sup>198</sup> The principle of uniformity prevents the excesses of variety. There were three central ideas in the text: first, the lack of intellectual and moral distance – a garden did not teach or give moral advice; second, emotional identification; and finally, the conception of aesthetical experience produced by the succession of multiple objects.

Shenstone was not an original thinker but he can be seen as an exemplary representative of a man of sensibility; recall that Boswell wrote about Shenstone’s ‘extreme sensibility’.<sup>199</sup> Shenstone’s direct impact on Boswell aside, to construct Boswell’s intellectual coordinates, it is illuminating to compare the similarities and differences of the two men. In his cultural critique, Shenstone preferred, contrary to Boswell, retired life in an Arcadian idyll to bustling anonymity and the extravagant ostentation of the city life. He was not sternly hostile towards the fashionable world, like Rousseau and his followers, but his attitude was distant and reserved. But in his reception of the big city, Boswell used “sentimental” categories very similar to those of Shenstone’s (and Kames’s) to illustrate his experience of the city as a spatial entity. This perspective structured fundamentally his urban experience: the very essence of London was, for Boswell, the stream of emotions caused by the succession of multiple milieus, peoples and things. In brief, he applied the sentimental views on gardens and landscape into the observation of the city.

Similar views also emerged in Boswell’s few remarks on gardens; his garden reception was strongly emotional, and his ‘sentimental gaze’ focused on the affective details of the gardens. In September 1792, in Lord Eliot’s Port Ellis Boswell found again that he had ‘little and Temple much relish of rural scenes’.<sup>200</sup> However, he wrote

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<sup>195</sup> William Shenstone, *Essays on Men and Manners*. London, 1794, 63-64.

<sup>196</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 64.

<sup>197</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 64.

<sup>198</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 64.

<sup>199</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell: The Applause of the Jury, 1782—1785* (ed. Irma Lustig). New York, Toronto and London, 1981, 71.

<sup>200</sup> Boswell, *The Great Biographer*, 189.



how the artificial landscape offered a ‘striking effect’: he had surveyed ‘a rising ground above a wood, on which is erected a summer house from whence is an extensive prospect both of land and sea’ and ‘a slate-quarry mixed with rock and rendered romantic by trees and bushes’.<sup>201</sup> In the park of Donaghadee, the mood was ‘romantic’ with a fascination of Gothic ruins as well as a strong sense of transitoriness. ‘We went to Grey Abbey, where is one of the finest Gothic ruins I ever saw, though there are but small remains of it. There has been a noble church and a large convent. Of the convent little is left’, Boswell noted in his journal in 1769, ‘but there is a good part of the church standing; in particular there is an end window with three divisions in it, exceedingly Gothic, and covered with a thicker ivy than I ever saw, which adds greatly to its appearance.’<sup>202</sup> The observed landscape had strong religious associations, but instead of piety or religious contemplation (or the censure of Catholic and ‘Medieval’ Gothic), the remains of the old abbey raised purely aesthetic pleasure. The contemplative state of mind was also dominant in the city garden. Boswell and his company had walked through the ‘delightful gardens’ of Kensington. The group of friends was ‘calm and happy,’ he remarked in his journal, and their conversation was ‘mild and agreeable.’<sup>203</sup>

The traditional country life was nonexistent in Boswell landscape meditations. Instead, he was fascinated by the magnificence of Lord Scarsdale’s residence Kedleston when visiting there in the 1770s. ‘The excellent gravel smooth roads,’ he recorded in his journal, ‘the large piece of water formed by my Lord from some small brooks, with a handsome barge upon it; the venerable Gothic church, now the family chapel, just by the house; in short, the grand group of objects agitated and distended my mind in a most agreeable manner.’<sup>204</sup> The verbs ‘agitate’ and ‘distend’ emphasized the strongly emotional character of the pleasure the garden produced; but the emotions did not have, contrary to most sentimental writers, any moral or social content. The tone was similar in Ayr. ‘One purpose I had this morning was to view Sir John Whitefoord’s old family seat, Blairquhan,’ he noted in his journal in the winter 1783, ‘I was much pleased with my ride, and the ancient house and large plane- and ash-trees at this Place delighted my ancient baron soul.’<sup>205</sup>

In May 1769 the ancient past was also present at Hillsborough where the Earl of Hillsborough kept a magnificent inn – although ‘the landlord and landlady are rather too fine people for their business’<sup>206</sup> – and the guest was fascinated by the several ingenious improvements. Boswell saw ‘very rich fields, all kinds of trees and shrubs, a river formed into beautiful pieces of water, and an excellent kitchen garden’.<sup>207</sup> The feudal

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<sup>201</sup> Boswell, *The Great Biographer*, 189.

<sup>202</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 212.

<sup>203</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 265.

<sup>204</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell in Extremes, 1776–1778* (ed. C. M. Weiss and Frederick A. Pottle). New York, 1970, 161-2.

<sup>205</sup> Boswell, *The Applause of the Jury*, 51.

<sup>206</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 218-9.

<sup>207</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 219.

past became visible in the garden where there were ‘many tombstones, a number of old trees, and the ruins of the burial-place of the Magennises to whom the domain anciently belonged’.<sup>208</sup> The garden walk reached its climax when the guide had conducted the party ‘along a noble, broad walk, at the end of which we entered a place hedged round, and all at once found ourselves in the churchyard, which my Lord has taken into his place. It has a fine effect.’<sup>209</sup> In 1775, cultivated and carefully planned nature had a similar effect on Boswell at Lord Pembroke’s estate at Wilton where ‘the river Avon runs beautifully through fine verdant turf’. Boswell admired cedars ‘of extraordinary size’ and a rock bridge planned by Sir William Chambers.<sup>210</sup> The core of Boswell’s garden experience was an aesthetic identification; the way to see a landscape as an aesthetic artefact, carefully planned conglomerate of plantations, views and historical allusions which raised strong but morally neutral emotions. His landscape reception had a strongly aristocratic overtone: landscape was created for pleasure and aesthetic delight; it functioned as scenery for the opulent life style of the fashionable society. The ‘lovely bowers of innocence and ease’<sup>211</sup> were miles away.

### *The Scottish Narrowness*

The young Boswell wrote to Temple in 1764 from Soleure, Switzerland: ‘the essential nature of man’ and ‘his happiness or misery ... depend almost entirely on his position,’<sup>212</sup> and then he told what this would have meant in practice: ‘This evening, Johnston, you are shivering with cold at Edinburgh, while I bid defiance to winter at Soleure. You are probably thoughtful and gloomy. I am thoughtful and gay.’<sup>213</sup> But why so different states of mind? Boswell clarified: ‘You are in a Scots town. I am in a Swiss town. You are in a dirty town. I am in a clean town. You have passed the day in uniformity. I have passed the day in variety.’<sup>214</sup> The sarcastic comment uncovered Boswell’s strong ambivalence towards his Scottish background. In spite of all the grandiose fantasies of ‘Old Scots Barons’ and the feudal past of the family, gloominess, narrowness and uniformity were often, for Boswell, the principal characteristics of Scottishness, both in the physical and mental sense. The other world of gaiety, openness and variety localized elsewhere, in the metropolis of London and in the courts and cities of the Continent.

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<sup>208</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 219.

<sup>209</sup> Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 219; see also Boswell, *In Search of a Wife*, 210.

<sup>210</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 154.

<sup>211</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, 17.

<sup>212</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 206–7.

<sup>213</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 207.

<sup>214</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 207

For Boswell, the tension between the city and the country was transposed into polarity between Scotland in general and particularly family estate Auchinleck, and the metropolis of London, the magnetic centre of his world. These localities grew into the symbols of two different interpretations of human civilization: the one was connected with continuity and permanency and the other with contingency, change and the free imagination. They referred to the realm of mental states, too; to the curious alternation of ecstasy and melancholy. The polarity meant a tension between painful ambiguity and the promise of happiness.

As an inheritor of Auchinleck, Boswell tried to identify with his role and adopt a feudal-romantic standpoint. Especially as a young man, this was not an inherited and unquestionable social status but a product of wild imagination, a fictitious role position, without a little reference to reality. Feudal steadiness was an integral part of the character of the real Scots baron: 'I am truly the Old Scottish baron: I might have said the old feudal baron. I am haughty towards the tenants of my estate.'<sup>215</sup> However, later when Boswell really was a kind of 'Old Scots Baron', the laird of Auchinleck, he seriously tried to identify with his new role, and he proved to be an effective developer who also entered into the details of the estate management.<sup>216</sup> Although his principal profession was that of barrister and he spent a lot of time in London, he felt a certain responsibility of the family inheritance.

In 1775, Boswell had read David Hartley's *Observations* and arrived at a gloomy and sceptical disposition. He concluded in his journal that philosophical theories were transient, whereas feudal principles remained for ages: 'In truth the mortality or immortality of the soul can make no difference on the enthusiasm for supporting a family.' Now the disposition was not boyishly fanciful but serene and introspective. He wondered why, in spite of the transitory nature of the world, 'a man will toil all his life and deny himself satisfactions in order to aggrandize his posterity after he is dead.' It is important to notice that, for Boswell, family duties were the object of intensive contemplation and problematization, not the self-evident and unquestionable part of the character like, as one might suppose, in the case of "real" feudal inheritor. 'It is, I fancy, from a kind of delusion in the imagination, which makes us figure ourselves contemplating for ages our own magnificence in a succession of descendants. So strong is this delusion with me that I would suffer death rather than let the estate of Auchinleck be sold; and this must be from an enthusiasm for an *idea* for the *Family*.'<sup>217</sup>

Imagination was a highly crucial element of Boswell's relation to the world, and this was the case in his reflections on the family. His identity as a country gentleman was highly problematic and did not have any other solid basis than imaginative

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<sup>215</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 43.

<sup>216</sup> See James Boswell, *The Correspondence of James Boswell with James Bruce and Andrew Gibb, Overseers of the Auchinleck Estate* (ed. Nellie Pottle Hankins and John Strawhorn). Edinburgh, New Haven and London, 1998.

<sup>217</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 207—8.

construction of the magnificent idea: ‘The founder of it I never saw, so how can I be zealous for his race? And were I to be a martyr, I should only be reckoned a madman. But an *idea* will produce the highest enthusiasm.’<sup>218</sup> Several years later, in the autumn 1780, Boswell remarked in his journal: ‘I was quite serene and comfortable this forenoon, and happy with a thought which never occurred to me before: that I might pass all the rest of my life in independent tranquillity at this place and have no reproach either from my own mind or the world as if I were acting improperly.’ He ended in a strongly emotional state of mind: ‘For I would be at *Auchinleck*, which comprehends so many romantic, pious, and worthy ideas in my imagination – at the seat of my family – at home.’<sup>219</sup> In the context of the course of Boswell’s life, this remark was an illusory hope, not the expression of a permanent state of mind. In the long run, imagination was not capable to manage the growing tension between the Scottish duties and the fascination of London. ‘I could not conceive at present how mankind in any situation could for a moment be deluded into a feeling of happiness, or even of quiet. I was *sure* that if I were at *Edinburgh* all the despicable dejection of my early years would return,’ resigned Boswell wrote in 1790, and he continued: ‘I dreaded that in a moment of desperation I might go thither. But I trusted that I should have as much firmness as to keep myself between London and Auchinleck.’<sup>220</sup> Sometimes he recognized only a gradational difference between London and Scotland. As a relatively aged man, he had moved back to London and noted in the summer 1786 that he felt London ‘quite easy, not at all as a strange land; not as *totally* different from Scotland in producing feelings but only as better.’<sup>221</sup> A little later the tone was different when he met a certain Mr. George Wallace whose ‘Edinburgh ideas and misanthropy’ irritated him.<sup>222</sup>

‘My views in coming to London this spring were: to refresh my mind by the variety and spirit of the metropolis, the conversation of my revered friend Mr. Samuel Johnson and that of other men of genius and learning,’<sup>223</sup> Boswell remarked in his journal in the spring 1772. The distinguished Boswell scholar Frederick A. Pottle crystallized the main point, ‘Boswell’s journal – the central literary creation of his life – was born of his almost enthusiastic notion of the felicity of London’.<sup>224</sup> In spite of endeavouring to be a “real” Scottish laird, London continued to be the centre of full and meaningful life. Ultimately, Boswell could not see Auchinleck, the family and the work in Edinburgh so meaningful that they would have dimmed the enchanting shine of the British metropolis. The narrowness of Edinburgh and the multiplicity of London life contrasted still stronger. ‘I was in a most listless state; felt no pleasure in life, nor could imagine any,’ he noted in his journal in the summer 1781, ‘my fancy roved on London

<sup>218</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 207–8.

<sup>219</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 241.

<sup>220</sup> Boswell, *The Great Biographer*, 75.

<sup>221</sup> Boswell, *The English Experiment*, 88.

<sup>222</sup> Boswell, *The English Experiment*, 133.

<sup>223</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 39.

<sup>224</sup> Pottle 1966, 86.

and the English bar [where Boswell was planning to apply], yet I had faint hopes of happiness even in the metropolis, which I dreaded would pall upon me...In short I did not know what to do.<sup>225</sup> A Sunday in Edinburgh turned gloomy when the visitors had left: 'I drank Tenerife negus and was comfortably warmed in body, but my mind roved in London, and was discontent, though we had a good social talk.'<sup>226</sup>

Sporadically images of London's multiple sensations produced a mentally unstable frame of mind. 'I found that my mind was not firm enough yet,' he recorded in the journal in the 1770s, 'for the prospect of going to London agitated me much more than I wished it should. ... Whereas London presents an animated multiplicity of views, so that a giddiness is produced.'<sup>227</sup> Boswell had a strong disposition to melancholy, and the narrow prospects of Scotland and Edinburgh predisposed him to the illness. The fundamental characteristic of Boswell did not remain unrecognizable to his intimate circle. An old Edinburgh friend was aware of his instability. He had recognized Boswell's longing for London and said sceptically that 'I know not if you will be at rest in London. But you will never be at rest out of it.' The oscillation between two poles of his life could be found in the same remark. Boswell wrote down in 1781: 'I felt a kind of weak, fallacious attachment to Edinburgh. But I considered, "I hope to be in Heaven, which is quitting Edinburgh. Why then should I not quit it to get to London, which is a high step in the scale of felicity?"'<sup>228</sup>

'It is strange that Scotland affects my spirits so woefully', Boswell wrote on November 8, 1785 to Edmund Malone and asked himself, with a little guilt, 'What *right* have I to be thus disgusted by *my own* country and *my own* countrymen'.<sup>229</sup> Edmund Burke had asked Boswell, then the laird of Auchinleck, how he could live in Edinburgh, and he had answered, 'Like a cat in an air-pump.'<sup>230</sup> The metaphor of narrowness is nearly always present in the imagery of the Scottish native place. 'In short, in so narrow a sphere,' he lamented in his journal in 1782, 'and amongst people to whom I am so unlike, my life is dragged on in languor and discontent.'<sup>231</sup> Boswell had spent a couple of days in Auchinleck with his family, and visited Edinburgh. All this had led to dismal melancholy. 'How strange, how weak, how unfortunate is it that this my *native city* and my *countrymen* should affect me with such wretchedness,' he wrote to Temple in the summer 1784. The arguments of the Scottish friends against joining the English bar

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<sup>225</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 386.

<sup>226</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 58.

<sup>227</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 215-6.

<sup>228</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 389-390.

<sup>229</sup> *The Correspondence of James Boswell with David Garrick, Edmund Burke, and Edmond Malone* (ed. George M. Kahrl, Rachel McClellan, Thomas W. Copeland, James M. Osborn and Peter S. Baker). London, 1986, 275-6.

<sup>230</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 432-3.

<sup>231</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 432-3.

sounded unbearable, so fastened Boswell was on this plan. All in all, ‘my happiness when last in London seems a delirium. I cannot account for it.’<sup>232</sup>

When he had taken his place in the English bar in the Inner Temple Hall, Boswell wrote down in February 1786, ‘I was quite the *Laird of Auchinleck in the Inner Temple*, free from any *imaginary distance*.’<sup>233</sup> Sometimes, in a good moment, the synthesis between two milieus seemed possible. In March 1783, he had arrived in London from Edinburgh, and he was in high spirits. ‘The feeling of independence’, freedom to come to London whenever he chose, had alleviated sometimes such an irreconcilable conflict. Boswell had looked at the list of the members of the Literary Club and he felt that even ‘The Club and everything else wonderfully approximated to Auchinleck’ in his imagination.<sup>234</sup> The figures of the Scottish Laird and the London gentleman seemed possible to be merged. ‘Went to Nerot’s and got my hair dressed,’ he remarked in his journal, ‘so as to appear decently well. Felt a steadiness as Laird of Auchinleck which I never before experienced in London’. In an omnipotent feeling, he even censured the estate owners who preferred to live in London.<sup>235</sup> In 1775, Boswell had a breakfast with Captain Erskine, his Scottish friend. He wrote in the diary: ‘There was something comfortable in being with one who, though well acquainted with London, knew Scotland well too, the ideas of both countries were well mixed; and London really seemed in my imagination the capital of both, and not a strange capital.’<sup>236</sup> Imagination also produced a character of a Scottish country gentleman who walked the streets of London with his head erect. In Hyde Park the feeling grew stronger: ‘I walked in Hyde Park, the sun shining bright, and an infinity of company in carriages and on horseback dazzling my sight, and read my *return* as a steady laird,’ he recorded in the spring 1783, and ‘though highly of my state in life, so that I did not see it insipid, even when compared with London in all its glory.’<sup>237</sup> As a middle-aged man, he wrote to Thomas Barnard on February 14, 1783 in a feudal mood: ‘I am an ancient baron, and I would by no means estrange myself from Auchinleck the romantick seat of my ancestors’, but he added that when absent he should be ‘in London rather than Edinburgh’.<sup>238</sup>

Boswell used to construct semi-fictitious role models through which he tested himself towards different facets of the world. Some models proved to be transitory, some others were permanent. In the end, the synthesis between the two main figures, the Scottish laird devoted to the domestic duties and the London gentleman showing in the public, did not work. At last, it seemed to be possible only in imagination. In 1779, when he was the laird of Auchinleck, Boswell wrote a remark on a scene in St. Paul’s

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<sup>232</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 261.

<sup>233</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 36.

<sup>234</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 80.

<sup>235</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 73.

<sup>236</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 95-6.

<sup>237</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 80-1.

<sup>238</sup> James Boswell, *The Correspondence of James Boswell with Certain Members of the Club* (ed. Charles N. Fifer). London, 1976, 129-130.

Cathedral: ‘At altar thanked God for uniting Auchinleck and St. Paul’s – romantic seat of my ancestors and this grand cathedral – “in the imagination Thou hast given me.”’<sup>239</sup>

In spite of the fleeting states of mind, clashing positions and mental disturbances, London remained the centre of Boswell’s life, both on the concrete and the imaginary levels. In Boswell’s case, it is possible to speak about the capital mentality, the desire to be in the centre of everything; even in its most developed forms, the province could not produce this state of mind. The metropolitan ethos could be perfectly crystallized by Lord Chesterfield words: ‘I love capitals extremely; it is in capitals that the best company is always to be found; and, consequently, the best manners to be learned. The very best provincial places have some awkwardness, that distinguishes their manners from those of the metropolis.’<sup>240</sup> Chesterfield quoted St. Evremond’s letter to the Earl of St. Albans: ‘*qu’un honnête homme doit vivre et mourir dans une capitale, et qu’il n’y en a que trois au monde, qui sont Rome, Paris, et Londres*’.<sup>241</sup> Only the capital city, with its courtly and *mondain* sphere of life, could be the scene of the multiplicity of external stimuli and cultivated social intercourse. The similarities between Boswell and the arrogant Earl did not end here; in spite of different background and milieu, the two men of letters came very close to each other in the issues of social life.

### *The Freedom of Solitude*

The anonymous author of the satire *London Unmask’d* depicts the metropolis as a kind of *anus mundi*; the city is represented in a very Dickensian way – but without the great Victorian’s empathy – as a nest of mental and physical filth. But in his journey through the moral inferno, the writer finds a resting place: ‘I proceeded, and soon reached a beautiful landscape as nature in its utmost verdure can possibly display. ... Here (suggested nature) is room for contemplation, till the mind bursts with thinking; we may trace the hand of Providence throughout creation’s works; all framed to subserve some important purpose, and each as it were subservient to the good of the whole.’<sup>242</sup> The idea of William Cowper’s proverb ‘God made the country, man made the town’ is presented in the pamphlet in the most extreme form: the harmonious universe of nature created by God is in an irreconcilable conflict with the vainness and artificiality of the disharmonious city.

The idea of solitude in the city was formulated from different viewpoints in the eighteenth century. Solitude in the city meant also the absence of familiar human contacts prevailing in small communities: neighbours, old friends, patrons and tenants;

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<sup>239</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 65.

<sup>240</sup> Lord Chesterfield, *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Chesterfield*, Vol. IV (ed. Bonamy Dobrée). New York, 1968, 1374.

<sup>241</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* VI, 2670.

<sup>242</sup> Anonymous, *London Unmask’d; or the New Town Spy*. London, 1784, 15.



the city was the city of strangers. In some cases this attention came close to the modern experience of an anonymous loneliness in the crowd. But for Boswell, loneliness in the city was a freely chosen state of existence, a positive aspect of the general liberty of the metropolitan lifestyle. Urban retirement was a complete opposite to the determined narrowness and isolation in the countryside. 'Indeed there is a great difference,' he noted in his journal, 'between solitude in the country, when you cannot help it, and in London, where you can in a moment be in the hurry and splendour of life.'<sup>243</sup> It was a freely chosen moment of contemplation in the middle of the bustling city life; a man could concentrate on himself while being conscious of the myriad attractions around him.

A friend and hero Dr Johnson had a slightly different interpretation. The retirement of the wise from the world was an ancient motive in literature: 'the love of Retirement has, in all ages, adhered closely to those minds which have been most enlarged by knowledge or elevated by genius. Those who enjoyed everything generally supposed to confer happiness have been forced to seek it in the shades of privacy.'<sup>244</sup> Retirement in a Johnsonian sense had a strong connection with piety: 'To facilitate this change of our affections it is necessary that we weaken the temptations of the world by retiring at certain seasons from it.'<sup>245</sup> Retirement in this sense came close to asceticism and monastic self-inspection and self-control, and it was 'only obtained by fervent prayer, steady resolutions, and frequent retirement from folly and vanity, from the lulling sounds of deceitful flattery and the tempting fight of prosperous wickedness.'<sup>246</sup> Retirement was a purifying act of self-consciousness which had strictly moral objectives.

Imagination, a central element in Boswell's romantic mode of experience, was strongly present in his meditations on retirement in an urban milieu. 'I am still living in my calm and pleasing chambers in the Inner Temple,' the young Boswell wrote to his friend John Johnson of Grange on July 23, 1763 when imagination had opened him dazzling historical visions of his living site, 'I have a thousand agreeable ideas which I have formed in my youth of this ancient Seat of Retirement, where so many of the brave Knights of Jerusalem have whilome dwelt and where the Spectator's ingenious friend fixed his Residence.'<sup>247</sup> In Boswell's imaginary world, the classicist and common-sense *Spectator* and romantic medievalism could live in a perfect harmony. According to him, retirement was closer to self-fashioning than ascetic self-control. Urban solitude, as Boswell saw it, was a component of the freedom of a city dweller; a situation that intensified the sensations within reach. He had moved to the peace of the Inner Temple,

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<sup>243</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 96.

<sup>244</sup> Johnson, *Rambler* I, 36.

<sup>245</sup> Johnson, *Rambler* I, 40.

<sup>246</sup> Johnson, *Rambler* I, 40.

<sup>247</sup> James Boswell, *The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange* (ed. R. S. Walker). London, 1966, 98.



the ancient sites of the Templars. He had found that normally isolation influenced negatively the state of mind, but now, when he had just arrived London, it caused, instead of anguish, pure pleasure. Boswell had walked with a friend in the City and arrived at the Temple which he found 'a most agreeable place' with its 'convenient buildings, handsome walks' and a view to the 'silver Thames'. This was a voluntary retreat where 'you quit all the hurry and bustle of the City in Fleet Street and the Strand, and all at once find yourself in a pleasant academical retreat'.<sup>248</sup> The memories of the recent gloomy narrowness were clear in his mind. 'The animal spirits, accustomed to be put in motion by the variation of bustling life, must be flat and torpid in the stillness of retirement,' he wrote to Temple on July 14, 1763, 'for my own part, retirement has always sunk my spirits; and I cannot say that I ever had any uneasy sensations upon coming to town.'<sup>249</sup> Freedom of choice was the core of the metropolitan life-style. 'In London you can either have or want company, just as you please,' Boswell continued in the same letter, 'so that you enjoy perfect freedom; and if any style of living you may be in is disagreeable to you, you have the comfort to think that it will not be long ere you get rid of it, and pursue any other plan which you may find to be most agreeable.'<sup>250</sup> He frequently used the expression 'whimsical' to characterize the singular pleasure produced by the floating metropolitan life. Whimsicality comprised more than the freedom of choice between fixed alternatives; it implied the affirmative acceptance of the incalculableness and transitory nature of the urban reality.

Boswell wrote the preceding enthusiastic remarks when he was a young man in his early twenties with unrestrained curiosity towards the world. Twenty years later, the tone remained the same. On March 10, 1789, he wrote to Temple how London was a superior place to live, irrespective of whether a man was in high or desperate spirits 'for the power of being at once wrapped up in undisturbed privacy, by not being personally known, and having an influx of various ideas, by being in the midst of multitudes,'<sup>251</sup> offered freedom of choice in the multiform metropolis. Privacy among the anonymous crowd was a recurrent theme in Boswell's writings; anonymity was the protection of intimacy and the guarantee of the personal freedom. In the tight network of familiar relations a human being is determinately dependent on the opinions of the others; in the big city, these suppressive ties could be broken or loosened. Metropolitan freedom had a direct impact on the mood for, by being among the multiplicity of the crowd, one 'cannot fail to dissipate many a cloud which would thicken and augment and press upon the spirits in the country, or in a narrower place.'<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 234; Boswell was quoting Reverend Dr. Hugh Blair's description.

<sup>249</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 18-9.

<sup>250</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 18-9.

<sup>251</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 229.

<sup>252</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 229.

## *Moving in the City*

Space and time are the most important variables of the urban experience. Temporally experienced relation between successive spaces is the basic structure, and movement is the factor which connects temporality to the city space. The city can be experienced through movement: variations of noise and silence, light and shadow, ascent and descent are the contributory factors in this cumulative effect, and in the background of the spatiotemporal urban experience is the modular rhythm of the walking step, which has measured the city space since the first civilizations.<sup>253</sup>

Movement has also been a social category. Lewis Mumford admired the collective drama of the medieval city where every city dweller, according to his rank and status, participated in communal action, both as a spectator and as a participant. Mumford argues, following his medievalist cultural criticism that the medieval conception of movement and participation in social drama was opposite to the social parade of the early modern city; the former did not make distinction between the spectators and the participants but the latter made strict segregation between upper-class actors and the audience. If the scene of medieval collective drama was the curving streets and undifferentiated market places of the medieval city, the main streets and pedestrian parks of the early modern city were the spheres of a new passive public life. The permanent movement of coaches and pedestrian served, according to Mumford, only to-see-and-to-be-seen kind of social vanity without any deeper communal meaning.<sup>254</sup> On the other hand, the 'social parade' opened new possibilities of seeing, communicating and encountering in the newly structured urban space.

The avenue and square became the principal element of the early modern city; its Cartesian order reflected the mathematical view of the world and, in concrete level, it offered setting for continuous movement through the city. The principle of movement dominated the visual reception of the city space: 'The rapidness and easiness of the movement – and I do not mean concrete physical movement but movement of the gaze longitudinally along the facade of the street – are determined by many factors, which all, depending on outlining, can either quicken or slow down the movement' The climax of the city was a square where the visual movement of the street calmed down like a 'river arriving at a lake', and the gaze stopped and turned in the space.<sup>255</sup> The avenue made possible movement as social amusement: squares, avenues, and facades were planned for observation from various perspectives enabled by movement. The regular

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<sup>253</sup> Edmund N. Bacon, *Design of Cities*. New York, 1967, 19-20.

<sup>254</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects*. New York and London. 1961, 375-379.

<sup>255</sup> Gustac Strengell, *Kaupunki taideluomana*. Helsinki, 1923, 32-33, 53.

organisation of the buildings and uniform facades intensified the aesthetic pleasure: facades and cornices moved towards the same vanishing point as the observer; the act of movement was more important than reaching the objects.<sup>256</sup>

The birth of the representative urban space and publicity might weaken some communal aspects of public life, but on the other hand, the floating movement made possible new types of social encounter. In seventeenth- and especially eighteenth-century London and Paris movement in the city space was given a new meaning: walking became highly important social activity; the function of walking was to see and meet people, to enjoy the transitory sensations of the street, not to see monuments. Originally, the French innovation *cours* was intended for exclusive sauntering and coach driving. John Evelyn wrote in his observations on the *Cours de la Reine* of Paris how hundreds of coaches were cruising and fine ladies and gallant gentlemen walked and amused in the park.<sup>257</sup> In London, the first park intended for gallant sociability was the St. James's Park, developed by King Charles the Second. The Park was socially more mixed than its Continental model. Tom Brown noticed how mixed the bustle in the Park was; here is a beau, there French fops; there are different kind of people from nobles to milkmaids.<sup>258</sup> According to Penelope J. Corfield, in England all kind of roads and streets 'had long been freely accessible to all comers, regardless of wealth or status. ...Custom and convention in England also endorsed the accessibility of the streets to all age and social groups and to both sexes.'<sup>259</sup> The universal street life made possible the plurality of public life and the personal freedom of movement. So walking was not any more only everyday necessity but a pleasure which was an end in itself.<sup>260</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the labyrinthine big city became a scene of adventure, like oceans and distant countries. According to Paul Zweig, the modern metropolis broke the traditional communal relations and left the city dwellers on their own inventiveness – they were lonely but free to create their own identity. Daniel Defoe was the first representative of the new sensibility. Zweig emphasizes the loneliness of the urban adventurer, and, surprisingly, he argues, that the figure was a manifestation of the Weberian 'secular monk' because, in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, the urban figure is moving, taking risk, and crafty, and the difference between her business activities and criminality is always vague.<sup>261</sup> Penelope Corfield formulated the figure of adventurer more concrete way. She writes about John Gay's *Trivia*, 'in which the big city had become at once the grail as well as location of the quest, and its denizens simultaneously heroes and hazards. The "great-hearted Odysseus" in modern times sets out for Ithaca with stout walking shoes and an umbrella but still faces the constant

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<sup>256</sup> Mumford 1961, 368.

<sup>257</sup> Kostof 1991, 251.

<sup>258</sup> Rasmussen 1967, 97.

<sup>259</sup> Penelope J. Corfield, 'The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 16, Number 2/February 1990, 133.

<sup>260</sup> Corfield 1990, 133-5.

<sup>261</sup> Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer*. New York, 1974, 102-4.

iteration of challenges and adventures, now located in the mutable world of the streets.<sup>262</sup> Miles Ogborn recognizes the same kind of ambivalence in *Trivia*'s relation to the city. According to him, the poem illustrates the relationship between the modern individual and the multiplicity of the city. The central theme is the tension between possibilities of experiencing in the city and its dangers: the poem leads the reader to urban adventures but, at the same time, it advises how to avoid filth, disorder and accidents; that is to say, the new individuality required strategies with which it was possible to walk within the crowd but to avoid the danger of total merging. This attitude differed both from aristocratic promenade and narcissist show of the *flâneur*.<sup>263</sup> In his article on *Trivia*, Philip Carter writes how among the 'key impediments to interacting with his fellow pedestrians' was, in the walker's experience, the use of disguise in urban encounters.<sup>264</sup> Indeed, the use of social masks and the hiding of one's identity in the big city were crucial issues in the social critique of eighteenth-century London.

Gay compared slightly comically the permanent tension between the heroic and hazardous aspects of the city walker's existence. He referred to those 'whose steps have printed *Asia*'s desert soil'<sup>265</sup> when he wrote about the walker's trials in the urban jungle: 'Consider, reader, what fatigues I 've known,/The toils, the perils of the wintry town;/What riots seen, what bustling crouds I bor'd.'<sup>266</sup> The menaces were both physical and social; and the latter, riots and bustling crouds, comprised a strong moral emphasis: the riotous mob was one of the manifestations of the moral illnesses from which the metropolis suffered. Finally Gay explicated that the poem had pedagogical ambitions: 'sets forth his journals to the publick view,/To caution, by his woes, the wandering crew.'<sup>267</sup> He was not alone with his instructive intentions: the eighteenth century saw a flood of city guides which advised on rational behaviour in the middle of the myriad threats of the metropolis.

In the beginning of the century, Edward Ward wrote his famous sketches on the London characters under the title *The London Spy* (1703). It was a starting point of a new urban "spy literature" genre; in countless pamphlets and poems, sketches and tracts, urban explorers mapped different spheres of London and characterized them and their population; the tone could be ironic or satirical, curious or horrified – but never indifferent. Sometimes the texts had pedagogical ambitions: they were instruction books for innocent provincials whom they advised to avoid innumerable perils, seductions and debaucheries lying low in the jungle of the metropolis, and this intention gave the authors a legitimate reason to describe the decadence of London in the most detailed way. Usually these observations included strong moral distinctions. The second

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<sup>262</sup> Corfield 1990, 136.

<sup>263</sup> Miles Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London Geographies, 1680—1780*. London, 1998, 112-3.

<sup>264</sup> Philip Carter, 'Faces and Crowds', in *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's Trivia (1716)* (ed. Clare Brant and Susan E. Whyman). Oxford, 2007, 33-5.

<sup>265</sup> John Gay, *The Poetical works of John Gay*. London, 1926, 87.

<sup>266</sup> Gay, *Poetical Works*, 87.

<sup>267</sup> Gay, *Poetical Works*, 87.

noteworthy feature was the viewpoint of the outside observer. This implied a highly rational and calculated attitude towards the crowd and the different spheres of the city; the emotional and immediate identification could be dangerous to the city dweller's safety and moral integrity. Ward's attitude was satirical: bankers and fops, prostitutes and reformists are all represented as downright egoists who unscrupulously exploit their fellow creatures' weaknesses. The city was a dangerous place – but enjoyably dangerous.<sup>268</sup>

Walking the streets of London was also considered in the pedagogical literature. Orientation in the city space full of sensations and dangers required rigid self control, the calculation of gestures and emotions. The city was not only the site of dangers and filth but also the scene of public appearance and social encounters. All this required reserve and the control of behaviour which had functions connected to representativeness, politeness and social distinctions as well as corporeal security. The manual of good behaviour, *The Polite Academy, or School of Behaviour for Young Gentlemen and Ladies* (1765), had a long chapter on walking, either alone or in a group. The conduct book comprised the same idea as *The Trivia* and the various city guides: the city was both fascinating and dangerous; and avoiding dangers and enjoying sensations required physical and mental distance from the motley city scene. Observation was an instrument to control this multiplicity; the gaze sifted the acceptable from the dangerous and ignorable.

A step from the private sphere to public did not give a young lady or gentleman any liberties in regard to authorities; on the contrary, they were expected to 'behave to them with same respect as at home.'<sup>269</sup> This required paying attention to discussion as well as to moving: 'walk silently, quietly and decently',<sup>270</sup> the conduct book advised. When a young gentleman walked in company, it set the limits to the movement: 'Never on an any occasion, run before, or lay far behind the company.'<sup>271</sup> A polite walker kept a certain distance to sensations and vulgar phenomena of the city – 'if you see anything that surprizes you, do not stop to stare at it, but look upon it and pass on'<sup>272</sup> –, and the social disorder of the city shall not disturb the integrity of a young walker: 'If you meet a rude or unmannerly boy, give him the way; you should no more dispute with such than keep them company.'<sup>273</sup> A young gentleman had to be especially careful with the anonymous crowd, and any communication with the mob was absolutely forbidden: 'walk to the other side of the street and never concern yourself about the matter.'<sup>274</sup> The disciplined observer should recognize the mixed and chaotic elements of the city space

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<sup>268</sup> Ogborn 1998, 107.

<sup>269</sup> Anonymous, *The Polite Academy, or School of Behaviour for young gentlemen and ladies*. London, 1762, 26.

<sup>270</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 26.

<sup>271</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 26.

<sup>272</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 26.

<sup>273</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 27.

<sup>274</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 28.

and keep safe distance from them. A young gentleman should not be ignorant of the dangerous and unsavoury facets of the city – the future man of the world had to be aware of the darker side of the world, too – but they had to be objectified by the distancing gaze and the moral and rational judgment.

When walking alone, internalized rules followed the young city dweller – ‘respect yourself as much as others, and walk as decently alone as if others were with you’<sup>275</sup> –, and a young gentleman’s behaviour should in any case not attract inappropriate attention: ‘Never whistle, or sing, as you walk along; for these are marks of clownishness and folly.’<sup>276</sup> The control of speech and movement, the respectful attitude towards the other pedestrians and the proper gestures like greetings, giving the way and giving the wall to the older and more distinguished, were the commands which had to be followed automatically. But the street was not only the sphere of danger and disorder, it was also a pedagogical space; the reader was advised to observe how the ‘gentlemen walk the streets, and walk like them’.<sup>277</sup> Walking was a representative duty for the people of high rank, a more informal version of the early modern promenade in pedestrian parks. Walking also had a communicative aspect: the street was the realm of exchanging of gestures, greetings, and speeches, and so walking was an integral part of the general culture of politeness. The city guides and conduct books counselled a rational and calculated relationship to the city space, and the city dweller should avoid moral and physical danger; she or she should be a critical observer of the urban space. In Bowell’s texts, it could be recognized a fundamentally different version of the eighteenth-century urbanism, an attitude towards the city which was immediate, emotional, and spontaneous.

### *The City of Whim*

London had gone through a phenomenal transformation after the Great Fire. The messy and congested medieval structures had been cleaned out and London was reborn in a Baroque and Palladian fashion. The Augustan humanists saw London as the imperial “Augusta”; the harmony of nature could also manifest itself in the architectural structures of the city. The rebuilding of London did not follow the grandiose Baroque master plan but the city was structured as a conglomerate of the square configurations; the Classical planning principles realized in the level of an individual square and its environs, not in the metropolitan scale. Peter Clark has characterized Early Modern and

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<sup>275</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 27.

<sup>276</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 27.

<sup>277</sup> *The Polite Academy*, 28.

eighteenth-century London with an expression *multi-centred metropolis*.<sup>278</sup> According to him, the Great Fire was a watershed in the evolution of the imagination of London. The changed imaginary had very concrete reasons because the ‘enforced exodus of so many residents and the long drawn-out rebuilding process created a sense of spatial disorientation and neighbourhood erosion in the old City.’<sup>279</sup> The process quickened in the eighteenth century, and the most crucial aspect of this development was the impressive growth of the West End which had begun in the seventeenth century.<sup>280</sup>

According to innumerable pamphlets, novels, and accounts, the characteristic feature of eighteenth-century London was a labyrinthine opaqueness; there were squares, avenues and monuments here and there but the dominating impression was amorphous structure and ocean-like endlessness. A London alderman George Macaulay wrote in 1790 that in the bustle of London there were people who physically resembled an observer but who in any other sense differed as much as a Bengalese or a Lapp.<sup>281</sup> The sprawl generated ominous visions, and the new imagery referred to chaos, decadence and simulated magnificence: London was called the Great Wen; it was seen as a seat of Oriental splendour; and, in the contemporary imagination, its endless nooks and alleys offered a refuge crime and debauchery.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were the most prominent representatives of the Augustan reception of London. For them, London was self-evidently the seedbed of the civilized forms of sociability; polite conversation and literary debate, musical and theatrical performances, several modes of polished sociability achieved their most advanced manifestations in the metropolitan milieu. In Addison and Steele’s moral weeklies, both the courtly representativeness and the intimate spheres of domestic life were almost non-existent, as were the libertinage and dissipation of London’s *demi-monde*. Their attention focused on the recently developed semi-public world; coffee-houses, clubs, theatres and pleasure-gardens formed the institutional context for urban sociability, and this was *The Tatler’s* and *The Spectator’s* perspective. Although positively curious about several urban phenomena, Addison and Steele drew some highly important distinctions concerning the city scene. The man of sense, they thought, had to have plain moral coordinates through which he observed the multiform urban reality. The main themes in their urban satire were classical – vanity, self-indulgence, extravagance, luxury, effeminacy – but they had some specific targets on the London scene of their time.

The “spectatorial” observer of the city was a wanderer who listed, classified and judged the sensations, curiously but from the reasoned distance. Movement through the

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<sup>278</sup> Peter Clark, ‘The Multi-Centred Metropolis: The Social and Cultural Landscapes of London, 1600—1840’, in *Two Capitals: London and Dublin, 1500—1840* (ed. Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie). Oxford, 2001, 239-242.

<sup>279</sup> Clark 2001, 241.

<sup>280</sup> Clark 2001, 246.

<sup>281</sup> Clark 2001, 239.



various spheres of London was a source of intellectual pleasure. Addison wrote in 1712 that he looked ‘upon it [London] as an Aggregate of various Nations distinguished from each other by their respective Customs, manners and Interests.’<sup>282</sup> The most fundamental distinction was the difference between the court and the city. Addison noticed that the ‘Courts of two Countries do not so much differ from one another, as the Court and City in their peculiar ways of Life and Conversation.’<sup>283</sup> However, the city had several sub-spheres, and Addison saw that inhabitants of the courtly and aristocratic St. James’s, ‘notwithstanding they live under the same Laws, and speak the same Language, are a distinct People from those of Cheapside, who are likewise removed from those of the Temple on the one side, and those of Smithfield on the other, by several Climates and Degrees in their ways of thinking and Conversing together.’<sup>284</sup> London appeared to Addison as a kaleidoscopic multitude of vistas, fashions, idioms and manners.

Multiplicity was a source of delight but it was seen through the prism of moral judgment. Richard Steele recorded how London was constituted of several different worlds. He wrote in *The Spectator*:

I lay one Night last Week at *Richmond*; and being restless, not out of Dissatisfaction, but a certain busy Inclination one sometimes has, I arose at Four in the Morning,’ and took Boat for *London*, with a Resolution to rove by Boat and Coach for the next Four and twenty Hours, till the many different Objects I must need meet with should tire my Imagination, and give me an Inclination to a Repose more profound than I was at that Time capable of.<sup>285</sup>

Imagination was, besides the source of pleasure for a man of sensibility, a synthetic power which created coherence to the multiple reality. Imagination generated changing scenes out of the myriad sensations of the city. Where Addison discovered several worlds, Steele distinguished different times: ‘The Hours of the Day and Night are taken up in the Cities of *London* and *Westminster* by People as different from each other as those who are born in different Centuries.’<sup>286</sup> Steele’s expedition continued to one of the market-ports of London which was ‘the most pleasing Scene imaginable to see the Cheerfulness with which these industrious people ply’d their Way to a certain Sale of their Goods.’<sup>287</sup> A sympathetic attitude towards commercial activities was a vital constituent of the ethos of the moral weeklies, and so the busy life and productive activities called writer’s attention also in the heart of London’s *demi monde*: ‘I could not believe any Place more entertaining than *Covent-Garden*; where I strolled from one

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<sup>282</sup> *The Spectator* (ed. Donald F. Bond), Vol. III. Oxford, 1965, 506.

<sup>283</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. III, 506.

<sup>284</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. III, 506.

<sup>285</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 98.

<sup>286</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 99.

<sup>287</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 99.



Fruit-Shop to another, with Crowds of agreeable young Women around me, who were purchasing Fruit for their respective families.’<sup>288</sup> Following his moral rationale, Steele contrasted forcefully the sunny productive facet of the Plaza with a darker sphere of vanity and dissipation: ‘The Day of People of Fashion began now to break, and carts and Hacks were mingled with Equipages of Show and vanity.’<sup>289</sup>

Loose morals and unproductive lifestyle were by no means the privilege of the people of fashion. The reporter experienced a little adventure among beggars and ballad singers, and then he arrived at Warwick Street: ‘as I was listening to a new Ballad, a ragged Rascal, a Beggar who knew me, came up to me, and began to turn the Eyes of the good Company upon me, by telling me he was extreme poor, and should die in the Streets for want of Drink.’<sup>290</sup> The moral emphasis in the remarks was clear: although the fashionable pleasures and the mixed bustle of the *demi monde* enhanced the attraction of the metropolis, this fascination was highly ambivalent; the perils of corruption lurked in the splendid equipages as well as in the shanties.

‘We walked up to Hyde Park Corner,’ Boswell wrote in his journal in 1763, ‘from whence we set out at ten. Our spirits were high with the notion of the adventure, and the variety that we met as we went along is amazing. As the Spectator observes, one end of London is like a different country from the other in look and in manners.’<sup>291</sup> When he was eight years old, his tutor John Dun had acquainted him with *The Spectator*, and this and the open-minded Christian humanist ethos of the respected tutor turned the young boy’s attention from the gloomy Calvinism to a more positive vision of the world.<sup>292</sup> Boswell’s reading of *The Spectator* deserves a short excursion because the weekly was for him an infallible guide to the mysteries of London, and Joseph Addison appeared to the young author as a model example of a literary London gentleman. Especially as a newcomer he monitored the London panorama through the “spectatorial” optics, and sometimes it was unclear where an acute observation or state of mind ended and a literary allusion began. The young man of letters used the weekly as a travel guide, sometimes in a slightly puerile way.

Boswell’s habit to frequent coffee-houses without company was a part of his Spectatorial saunters. He wrote down the anonymous conversations about different topics in Child’s Coffee-house in St. Paul’s Churchyard, where the talkers were named ‘1 Citizen’, ‘2 Citizen’ or ‘Physician’. The famous coffee-house had a literary aura, and Boswell remarked in his journal how ‘the Spectator mentions his being seen at Child’s, which makes me have an affection for it. I think myself like him, and am serenely happy there. There is something to me very agreeable in having my time laid out in

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<sup>288</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 99.

<sup>289</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 101.

<sup>290</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. IV, 101.

<sup>291</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 153.

<sup>292</sup> Martin 2004, 39.

some method, such as every Saturday going to Child's.<sup>293</sup> The immediate and emotional identification was the prevailing attitude. Will's Coffee House in Covent Garden had been a seat of London literati since the times of Dryden: 'Temple and I drank coffee at *Will's*, so often mentioned in *The Spectator*.'<sup>294</sup> Boswell had the garden scene of *The Spectator* No. 77 in mind when he wrote in his journal in the spring 1775 that 'Langton and I walked near an hour in Somerset Gardens, where I never had been before. It was very agreeable to find quietness and old trees in the very heart of London. My dissipation and hurry of spirits were cured here. We talked of religion. It was quite such a scene as *The Spectator* pictures.'<sup>295</sup>

The allusions to *The Spectator* are found mostly in the *London Journal*, at the time when the brand-new Londoner needed coordinates in the new and confusing reality. After fifteen years, Boswell was looking for Child's and made a melancholy remark: 'As I walked back again to the Poultry, I went to drink tea at Child's Coffee-house, my constant resort every Saturday during the winter that I lived in London.' He founded that it had been turned into private use which raised a heavy-hearted mood: 'It was to a certain degree a melancholy regret to find an old coffee-house,' he noted in his journal, 'well known to the wits of Queen Anne's reign and of which I had read in *The Spectator*, no more. The extinction of anything that has given us any pleasure or comfort, or even to which we have been accustomed, gives us uneasiness.'<sup>296</sup>

The young Boswell had recently moved to London, and his mind was full of spectacular reveries about the metropolis. 'Mrs. Gould and Mrs. Douglas and I went in the Colonel's chariot to the Haymarket,' wrote Boswell and noted how the company drove and 'spoke good English' and how he was 'full of rich imagination of London, ideas suggested by the Spectator' and how difficult it was to explain this enthusiasm to others, but, anyway, the spirits were high: 'My blood glows and my mind is agitated with felicity.'<sup>297</sup> But *The Spectator* had a rural dimension, too. In a Sunday morning Boswell was waiting for a stagecoach to Oxford: 'I imagined myself the Spectator taking one of his rural excursions.'<sup>298</sup> Sometimes the identification with Mr. Spectator proved to be impossible; in the theatre, after the performance of *Macbeth*, the excitement had grown too strong: 'We endeavoured to work our minds into the frame of the Spectator, but we could not. We were both too dissipated.'<sup>299</sup> The ideas were from *The Spectator* but the tone was different: it is unimaginable that Addison or Steele would have written this highly enthusiastic, emotional and un-analytical approach; *The Spectator's* rational commonsense, critical distance and steady moral were totally non-existent. While *The Spectator's* way of observing was a kind of "empiricism of the

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<sup>293</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 76.

<sup>294</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 286.

<sup>295</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 141.

<sup>296</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 220.

<sup>297</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 129-130.

<sup>298</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 244.

<sup>299</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 240.

street” connected with moral judgments, Boswell’s reception could be characterized as the emotional affirmation of the multiplicity. The intense sense of contingency and transitoriness was an essential constituent of this experience.

‘Set out from my house, no. Great Portland Street,’ fervent Boswell wrote in his journal in August 1792, ‘with my daughters Veronica and Euphemia in a post-chaise, about a quarter before eight in the morning. The weather was fine. As we drove through Oxford Street, we felt the love of London strongly.’<sup>300</sup> For Boswell, movement was an end in itself; the variety of objects and the excitement caused by contingency created a unique pleasure; the prospects of the city and the enthusiastic state of mind were merged together. ‘Walked over Westminster Bridge. Drank tea and eat bread and butter at a corner house with excellent prospect of London,’ he remarked in his journal in euphoric mood, ‘Was in charming frame. Walked along, thinking to get a cast in or on some coach or chaise. After a while, had ambition to walk it out. Did so, with gay vigour.’<sup>301</sup> The Boswellian adventurer was neither a calculating observer who kept a rational distance to the sensations and perils of the city nor a man of “healthy” morals who would have written classical satire about the vainness of the city life. On the contrary, he was a hunter of strong experiences and exceptional sensations; he did not avoid risks and he was not afraid of the crowd, strangers, unknown places and people – of otherness in its various forms. And finally, he was not a rational being but a man led by whims, associations, and feelings. Contingency and transitoriness were positive factors in Boswell’s city experience; whimsical movement transformed the city to a scene of social and erotic possibilities.

Movement was an element which created connections between separate spheres. ‘We then walked to the Exchange, and sauntered into Guildhall. I was in good London humour and comfortable enough. We dined at Dolly’s Beefsteak-house; then went to Saint Paul’s Church and heard the choir chanting,’ Boswell wrote down in 1763 and concluded that ‘this was a day of great variety.’<sup>302</sup> The expression ‘a day of great variety’ crystallized a highly important element in Boswell’s urban experience: the city was a scene of multiplicity, in contrast to the uniformity of the countryside and the narrow spheres. The whimsical ‘adventure’ raised only joyful and positively exciting feelings; likewise the variety of the metropolis was amazing; the overtone of anguish and fear was totally absent, as was repugnance to the filth of the city.

The light-hearted curiosity was the dominating tone in the journey through the ‘different countries’ of which London was constituted. ‘I then dined at Chapman’s Eating-house in Oxford Road,’ the young Boswell wrote in his journal, ‘I am resolved to have a variety of dining places. I am amused this way. I shall by degrees see many a one. This is a kind of curiosity whimsical enough.’<sup>303</sup> Again the term ‘variety’

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<sup>300</sup> Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 158.

<sup>301</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 338.

<sup>302</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 222.

<sup>303</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 222.

positively valued. It has to be called attention to the term ‘whimsical’; ‘whim’ and ‘whimsical’ were repeated frequently in remarks by Boswell’s, and without exceptions in an enthusiastic manner. The expression referred to the dimension of freedom in the metropolitan milieu; freedom of the city dweller was not the result of rational calculation but a series of affective responses to the contingent sensations and situations. ‘Man may do what he pleases in London. Sauntered along courts and streets,’<sup>304</sup> he remarked in the journal in the 1770s. This included a vision of urban civilization as a heterogeneous, floating and transitory reality; and these features enabled freedom to fashion one’s self and ways of experiencing. The orientation in the floating world required an exceptional personality: ‘I declaimed on the felicity of London. But they were cold and could not understand me. They reasoned plainly like people in the common road of life, and I like a man of fancy and whim.’<sup>305</sup> Boswell identified the ‘common road of life’ strongly with the rational, utilitarian, bourgeois view of life.

The man of sensibility who was capable of excavating the deepest meanings of the metropolitan life was not primarily the man of reason but the man of extraordinary emotions and passions. This kind of person should take stoically the comments of the ordinary people and follow the course of his own:

Indeed, I will not bear reasoning. But I can hear the rude attacks of people on my notions, and pursue them with complacency and satisfaction. Indeed, as to the happiness of life, it is neither in this thing nor that thing. It is in everything. Reason is not the sole guide. Inclination must chiefly direct us; and in this, one man’s inclination is just as good as another’s. For my own part, I shall always endeavour to be as happy as I can.<sup>306</sup>

This conception of personality was close to the Romantic cult of genius and the conception of an exceptional personality: the phenomenal talent and sensitivity was a fundamentally non-rational phenomenon and exceeded the limits of the commonplace reasoning.

Boswell affirmed without reserve the transitory and chaotic nature of the metropolis and saw these features as a possibility to free and creative behaviour: the successive startling situations intensified the pleasure of the bustle of the city. Movement through the different spheres of the city was also a move from the one disposition to another, and the remarks had a temporal dimension, too. ‘I went to Douglas’s and drank tea. I next went and called in Southampton Street, Strand, for Miss Sally Forrester, my first love, who lived at the Blue Periwig,’ the young Boswell wrote in elegiac mood in his journal. He had found that ‘the people of the house were broke

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<sup>304</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 251.

<sup>305</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 123.

<sup>306</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 123.

and dead' and he could never hear nothing of her; and he continued: 'I also called for Miss Jeany Wells in Barrack Street, Soho, but found that she was fled, they knew not whither, and had been ruined with extravagance. Good heaven, thought I, what an amazing change in two years! I saw in the year 1760 these young ladies in all the glow of beauty and admiration; and now they are utterly erased or worse.'<sup>307</sup> Intimate memories had usually a more delighted mood as on a Sunday in the spring 1763:

As I was rather in bad frame, and as it was the last day of the ladies' being in London, I stayed at home from church. Erskine and I took a walk to Covent Garden, and I carried him to Southampton Street and showed him the house in which I first paid my addresses to the Paphian Queen, where I first experienced the melting and transporting rites of Love.<sup>308</sup>

The occasional sexual encounters were a central part of the floating world of Boswell's London, and now the tone was frolic and positive. 'I was diverted at walking the streets of London with Dr. Blair,' he wrote down in 1763, 'I marched him down Southampton Street in the Strand, from the whimsical idea of passing under the windows of my first London lady of the town with an Edinburgh minister whom I had so often heard preach in the New Church.'<sup>309</sup> Occasionally, in Boswell's remarks, sacral and erotic spheres were mingled in a confusing way, but they never had any blasphemous undertone; rather the sacral and the erotic were two facets of his aesthetic world view. However, typically the transient encounters in the changing urban scenes were a pleasure in itself. The middle-aged Boswell wrote in his journal in the spring 1776:

As I walked along the Strand, I observed a gentleman's servant in a one-horse chair. I thought I might get into it. If he damned me for asking, I should be no worse. If he agreed to my having a place in it, I should be amused with an adventure. So I stopped him and asked if he was going towards Pall Mall. He said yes. "I'll give you a pint of beer if you'll let me come up beside you." "Come up, Sir," said he. I accordingly mounted, was instantly quite frank and free, and in a few minutes had the reins and whip, and drove cheerfully along. The street was quiet, it being Sunday morning, so I got easily forward. The servant told me his master was Mr. Pritchard of Shelvoek, ten miles beyond Shrewsbury, and that he had come up for a little while to London. In Cockspur Street I observed Mr. John Swinton. I hailed him and told him in the French not to take notice, for that this good fellow did not know me. John seemed amazed. I liked this little adventure. I had a pleasant drive for almost nothing, for I gave the man only a halfpence, being all the copper in my pocket, and he was very well content. I dismounted in the Haymarket. Suppose anybody whom I knew had seen me, I was driving in a chair with a

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<sup>307</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 46-47.

<sup>308</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 214-5.

<sup>309</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 236.

servant, and what then? If a man can but keep his own secret, he may do many amusing things in London.<sup>310</sup>

The themes of threat, danger and fear, so common in eighteenth-century London reception, did not exist in Boswell. Instead the changing spheres of London were infinite source of joy and pleasure; the floating metropolis offered possibilities to follow one's whims and fantasies. The saunter in the streets of London was not forced to follow predetermined plan but he was free to realize his on fancies in the polyphonic metropolis. Instead of being a totalizing panorama of the city, Boswell's London was a fragmentary collage formed of heterogeneous particles. When the multiple and changing nature of London was a moral problem for several eighteenth-century writers, Boswell's attitude could be called ecstatic and affirmative; the metropolis was a scene of whims and fancies.

### *Melancholy and the City*

'I was struck with agreeable wonder and admiration by contemplating the immensity of the metropolis and the multitude of objects,' Boswell remarked in his journal in the 1770s, 'above all, by the number and variety of people; and all melancholy was as clearly dissipated as if it had never existed in my mind.'<sup>311</sup> The metropolis was also a state of mind; and, it influenced inner feelings in a very special way: it could, according to Boswell, be a remedy against melancholy, the illness of the century, which was a much discussed topic in eighteenth-century medical and quasi-medical literature. According to this medical literature, melancholy was connected with an urban life-style; the hectic rhythm of life, amusements, to say nothing of stimulants, predisposed a city-dweller to hypochondria.

The theoretical discussions about melancholy had the aspect of civilizational critique. For instance, the physician and popular writer George Cheyne taught that melancholy was an English disease because of the high level of the civilizing process to which the nation had come up. Prosperity, the cultivated intellectual life, over-sophisticated forms of politeness, and, after all, the highly competitive and endlessly stimuli-offering *beau monde* endangered the health of the nation.<sup>312</sup> Assemblies, musical gatherings, plays and gaming along with gluttony, excessive drinking, and sexual affairs predisposed the fashionable society to hypochondria.<sup>313</sup> Tom Rakewell, the main character in William Hogarth's series *The Rake's Progress* was a man of

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<sup>310</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 263.

<sup>311</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 220.

<sup>312</sup> Roy Porter, 'Introduction', in George Cheyne, *The English Malady* (ed. Roy Porter). London, 1991, xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>313</sup> Porter 1991, xxiii-xxix.

pleasure who finally became mentally ill and was confined to a lunatic asylum.<sup>314</sup> Fundamentally Cheyne was not hostile to developed civilization but its over-cultivated forms were a threat to mental health. He emphasized the importance of moderation and the avoidance of extreme states of mind; and as a remedy for a broken melancholy, he recommended a simple and robust diet and peaceful country life.<sup>315</sup>

The Cheynian theory was a commonplace in eighteenth-century Britain. In general, Boswell did not share it, but sometimes the black dog of melancholy haunted the happy scenes of Boswell's London, and the city could be a background for sombre views: 'Erskine breakfasted with me. We parted in the forenoon, and I sauntered up and down the streets rather out of spirits.'<sup>316</sup> On a Good Friday a low-spirited feeling prevailed. 'This being Good Friday,' the young Boswell wrote down in a sombre mood, 'I endeavoured to excite my mind a devout and solemn frame. I don't know how it happened, but a sort of listlessness seized me; and instead of going to church I strolled up and down all day.'<sup>317</sup> However, the gloomy state of mind was not necessarily caused by the city but the depression had developed to the degree in which *even* the metropolis could not afford solace: 'I sauntered into various coffee-houses "seeking rest and finding none"'<sup>318</sup> Boswell was ageing, his disposition had been exhausted by alcohol, illnesses and disillusionments, and his sensibility towards London had become torpid; old refreshing images did no longer come to life: 'So we went and dined at the Piazza Coffee-house. The scene of beings eating *isolés*, which I once thought London independence, seemed dreary.'<sup>319</sup> Boswell had frequented coffee-houses in gloomy mood, and the life-long and unsolvable conflict broke into consciousness, with disastrous consequences. 'When I got into the streets again I was so depressed that the tears run down my cheeks,' he wrote down in a desperate mood in the summer 1786. 'I thought of my dear wife and children with tender affection. I upbraided myself for being so long absent from them. I upbraided myself for neglecting Auchinleck.'<sup>320</sup>

In the last phase of Boswell's life, the streets of London, earlier so full of life, could show themselves as deserted and oppressive, as though anticipating the modern experience of isolation in the city. In the summer 1790, Boswell sauntered and looked for company in coffee-houses: 'wished to have a social evening at a coffee-house. Tried the Grecian, Temple, and George's, Temple Bar; hardly a soul there or at Nando's. Read the Scottish newspapers at Peele's, which was pretty full. But I knew nobody. The Bedford was empty, and one solitary gentleman sat in the Piazza.'<sup>321</sup> Clearly these gloomy remarks reflected Boswell's worsened state of mind; it is highly unlikely that

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<sup>314</sup> Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth*. New Haven and London, 1986, 179.

<sup>315</sup> Jarrett 1986, 177-9.

<sup>316</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 226.

<sup>317</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 231.

<sup>318</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 78.

<sup>319</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 40.

<sup>320</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 78-9.

<sup>321</sup> Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 95.



his fundamental attitudes towards the city could have suddenly changed. However, we can speculate whether these observations reflected more general changes in the public life of London. Paul Langford has argued that conformism and isolation characterized the public and semi-public life in London in the last decades of the eighteenth century, not open and spontaneous sociability which Richard Sennett has admiringly described. According to Langford, taciturnity and reserve were the central features of the London public figures in the end of the century. He refers to the observations of some foreign visitors. Langford has strongly criticized Sennett's 'utopian' vision of eighteenth-century London as a scene of flourishing sociability based on anonymity, spontaneity and theatrical expression.<sup>322</sup> Sennett's view is highly polemic and simplifying, but to be precise, he writes on the first half of the century, Langford on the second half of the eighteenth and on the first decades of the nineteenth century. Sennett argues that when the modern individual as a unique "person" entered to the stage of public life in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the need to protect this authentic core of the self led to isolation, conformity and decline of the spontaneous sociability.<sup>323</sup> Maybe ultra-sensitive Boswell noticed that times had changed.

The disease of the century never left Boswell alone; his essays, journals and letters are full of the anguished descriptions of the effects of melancholy: despair, lack of zest for life, excessive drinking, fits of self-contempt. His excessive life style did not promote the balanced disposition, so that one might think that Boswell was a very typical "Cheynian" case of melancholy, but he himself had a different viewpoint. For Boswell, the bustle of city life and cheerful company were the best remedy for melancholy.<sup>324</sup> The shadow of hypochondria was always lurking in the narrow and monotonous spheres, but the big city, its multiple sensations kept the black dog away. He wrote to Johnston on October 6, 1764 from Leipzig:

I find myself perfectly well in this City which is much larger than I imagined. It is a fair time; so that there is here an immense concourse of all nations. The hurry the variety the novelty agitate my spirits and leave no entrance for the gloomy fiend [i.e. melancholy]. If he shows his black visage on the frontiers of my Mind a detachment of brisk animal spirits like a Corps of light troops give him a reception so smart that he is glad to retreat with grumbling precipitation.<sup>325</sup>

Variety and novelty, the highly important terms in Boswells' reception of the city, were strongly present also in connection with melancholy. 'Awaked very uneasy after my intoxication,' he remarked in the spring 1775, 'Went to Old Slaughter's Coffee-house,

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<sup>322</sup> Paul Langford, 'British Politeness and the Progress of Western Manners: an Eighteenth-Century Enigma', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. VII, 1996, passim; Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650—1850*. Oxford, 2000, 175-265.

<sup>323</sup> Sennett 1978, 64—82.

<sup>324</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 44.

<sup>325</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Grange*, 136.



and drank some brandy and water; was a sad being for a while, but recovered pretty well by walking in the streets of London, which is really to me a high entertainment of itself.<sup>326</sup> Boswell had an intense relation to sociability; he needed social encounters to satisfy his unquenchable thirst for estimation and social approval, but sociability was also for him a strong stimulant without which he could fall into despair. In the summer 1786, Boswell had been dreary and suffered for mental pain which ‘could not be endured quietly.’ But the mood could change quickly. He wrote down: ‘I called on Malone. Courtenay came, and Malone insisted that we should dine with him. We did so. My spirit revived, and I had as full enjoyment of life as any time, we had coffee and tea, then pickled salmon, and sat till one, full of excellent conversation. Good Madeira and port warmed and elevated me.’<sup>327</sup>

City was a therapeutic space. Boswell had left his company in melancholy spirits. ‘At night temple, Claxton, Bob, and I went to Vauxhall by water. Somehow or another, I was very low-spirited and melancholy, and could not relish a gay entertainment, and was very discontent,’ he remarked in his journal and continued, ‘I left my company and mounting on the back of a hackney-coach, rattled away to town in the attitude of a footman. The whimsical oddity of this, the jolting of the machine, and the soft breeze of the evening made me very well again.’<sup>328</sup> The ‘whimsical oddity’ was the essence of the London life; it referred both to the freedom of action and the imaginative dimension of the city. The transient nature of the city life offered a possibility to be whimsical in relation to one’s identity.

The old and exhausted Boswell had been in very restless state and unwilling to dine at home: ‘I sauntered down Bond Street and St. James’s Street, hoping to meet somebody who would ask me. But all in vain.’ A dreary weather emphasized the oppressive feeling. But wholly unexpectedly, Lord Eardley spoke to Boswell: ‘After shaking hands and being *politely* told that he had been looking in a wrong street for my house in order to call me.’ Melancholy disposition was away when Boswell left for home: ‘When hurrying home, I felt a wonderful elation. After a dreary despair, here was not only a dinner, but a capital dinner. “There is no place but London,” I exclaimed, “where this could have happened!” My spirits rose.’ The dinner party was not a disappointment. The enthusiastic tone with which Boswell characterized the aristocratic nature of the social and physical milieu emphasized his highly snobbish reception of London; the metropolis was a fascinating scene of social mixture, but the very pith of it was the exclusive publicity of high society: ‘Our company was a French *aristocrate* who was going to join Lord Moira, a clergyman, Colonel Morrison, whom I had a cordial satisfaction in meeting, Lord Eardley’s eldest son, and Mr. Culling Smith, his son-in-law, and three young gentlemen, their companions.’ The company was

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<sup>326</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 111.

<sup>327</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 79-80.

<sup>328</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 286.

entertained 'in his Lordship's magnificent dining-room' where 'the dinner was truly admirable, the wines excellent.' Boswell considered 'calmly the irresistible effect of such entertainment.'<sup>329</sup> In the episode, the concrete movement was connected to the changing social situations. Contingency was both a spatial and social category; the city was the space generating random occasions. For Boswell, city was not the space which required rational calculation, critical distance, and moral distinctions but, on the contrary, it was a milieu which was characterized by contingency, whimsicality, and emotional sensations.

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<sup>329</sup> Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 256-257.

## II OBSERVATION AND ECSTASY

‘London,’ Boswell remarked in his journal in the 1770s, ‘presents an animated multiplicity of views so that giddiness is produced.’<sup>330</sup> Many years later, just before his death he wrote down: ‘The *intellectual* luxury of London, after so long an absence from it, has no doubt *occupied* me much – or *dissipated* me so much, I believe I should rather say – that I have not been able to settle either to read or write with composure.’<sup>331</sup> Boswell had recognised that his London experience had a uniquely strong emotional facet which he had to learn to master. His identification with the multiple sensations of the metropolis was emotionally so intense that he realized that he had to fashion himself to receive the stream of people and the unanimated objects of the metropolitan scene. The city was not the object of serene contemplation, but the spectacle of the street could raise uncontrollable emotions which had to be managed with certain methods of self-discipline and self-cultivation.

In one sense, Boswell’s city as a spatial and sensual experience can be illustrated with terminology from Lord Kames’s and Shenstone’s aesthetics, where imagination, variety, novelty and multiplicity were the crucial concepts. Boswell had also read carefully Addison’s essays on the pleasures of the imagination as well as Kames’ central works on aesthetics, and he reflected the urban milieu through their conceptual optics. But Boswell was not completely the Addisonian spectator of the town; his perspective included the aspect of immediate and intense emotional identification which was foreign to the moral weeklies, but had similarities to the pre-romantic cult of feeling. But whereas the pre-romantic ethos was dominantly anti-urban, Boswell found the whole world of emotional intensities among the hectic sociability, the crowd, myriad inanimate objects of London.

This chapter examines Boswell’s emotional and affirmative identification with the multiplicity of the metropolis, which was not an unproblematic position: London could be so totally captivating that it caused mental instability; the city was a drug which had to be dosed carefully. First, to form a context, I will explore some eighteenth-century modes of observing the city.

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<sup>330</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 216.

<sup>331</sup> Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 310.

## *Observing the City*

‘Careful observers, studious of the town,’ addressed John Gay his readers in the poem *Trivia*, a poem about walking the streets of London.<sup>332</sup> The eighteenth century generated various modes of observing the city. Observation of the city from the critical distance was a common position, and usually the observer himself was as invisible as possible; he did not participate to the activities he depicted, only registered and estimated them. Gay’s poem included the strong ethos of avoiding the dangers. The city offered several fascinating sensations, but enjoying them required the careful observation of the possible perils. The menaces could be physical but also moral by nature; the multiplicity of the city comprised the vanishing of the moral coordinates.

Observing the urban phenomena was the central theme in Addison and Steele’s weeklies, but Addison also wrote about contemplation on a more abstract level. In his essays on the pleasures of the imagination, he reflected the relationship between perception and imagination. Addison noticed that the sight ‘is the most perfect and most delightful of all our Senses. It fills the Mind with the largest Variety of Ideas converses with its Objects at the greatest Distance, and continues the longest Action without being tired or satiated with its proper enjoyments.’<sup>333</sup> Addison introduced a figure of *a man of polite imagination* to illustrate those who have a cultivated taste and who can get pleasure from observing objects which do not interest the vulgar people at all. This enjoyment was not connected with ownership but ‘it gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the World, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind.’<sup>334</sup> Multiplicity and variation were the central terms according to the eighteenth-century aesthetic experience. Addison used the expression ‘multitude of charms’ and a little later he noticed how the human mind hates all the metaphors of limitation and closeness. Imagination gets pleasure from different kinds of impulses:

Every thing that is *new* or *uncommon* raises the Pleasure in the Imagination, because it fills the Soul with an agreeable Surprise, gratifies its Curiosity. And gives it an Idea of which it was not before possest. We are, indeed, so often conversant with one Sett of objects, and tired out with so many repeated Shows of same Things, that whatever *new* or *uncommon* contributes a little to vary Human Life, and to divert our Minds, for a while, with the strangeness of its Appearance: It serves us for a kind of Refreshment, and takes off from

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<sup>332</sup> Gay, *Works*, 72.

<sup>333</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. III, 535-6.

<sup>334</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. III, 538.

that Satiety we are apt to complain of in our usual and ordinary Entertainments.<sup>335</sup>

Addison was an archetypal Augustan man of the town; he sauntered round the city and observed the myriad phenomena of London with benevolent curiosity, although the rational and moralist judgment was always present. ‘There is no Place in the Town which I so much love to frequent as the *Royal-Exchange*,’<sup>336</sup> begins his essay on the Royal Exchange. Many of *The Spectator’s* central motives concerning London life interweave in the text. First of all, London is the flourishing centre of commercial empire whose heart the Exchange was. So to observe the bustle in the Exchange ‘gratifies my Vanity, as I am an *Englishman*, to see so rich an Assembly of Country-men and Foreigners consulting together upon the private Business of Mankind, and making this Metropolis a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth.’<sup>337</sup> In spite of the author’s patriotic pride, the cosmopolitan scene fascinated him even more:

I have often been pleased to hear Disputes adjusted between an Inhabitant of *Japan* and an Alderman of *London*, or to see a Subject of the *Great Mogul* entering into a league with one of the *Czar of Muscovy*. I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several Ministers of Commerce, as they are distinguished by their different Walks and different Languages.<sup>338</sup>

Addison plays with the idea of changing identity: ‘I am a *Dane*, *Swede*, or *French-Man* at different times, or rather fancy my self like the old Philosopher, who upon being asked what Cauntry-man he was, replied, That he was a Citizen of the World.’<sup>339</sup> In this topic, Boswell was close to Addison; he, too, saw the city as a scene where people play with different identities. Boswell also found the multiplicity of city as source of special kind of pleasure. This seems to have been also Addison’s position, when he enjoyed ‘this busie Multitude of People’<sup>340</sup> However, the observer kept a certain distance to the crowd, and the attitude was fully rational: Addison identified and classified national types and made estimations of the benefits their businesses create.

In a chapter in *The Tatler* the distance was twofold: rational *and* moral, and the tone was slightly satirical: ‘I entered the Theatre the other Day, and placed my self in a Corner of it, very convenient for seeing, without being my self observed.’<sup>341</sup> The writer comes back to the theme some issues later:

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<sup>335</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. III, 541.

<sup>336</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. I, 292.

<sup>337</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. I, 292-3.

<sup>338</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. I, 293-4.

<sup>339</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. I, 294.

<sup>340</sup> *The Spectator*, Vol. I, 294.

<sup>341</sup> *The Tatler* (ed. Donald F. Bond), Vol. I—II. Oxford, 1987, 154.

I confess, it is one of my greatest Delights to sit unobserved and unknown in the gallery, and entertain my self either with what is personated on the Stage, or observe what Appearances present themselves in the Audience. If there were no other good Consequences in a Playhouse, than that so many Persons of different Ranks and Conditions are placed there in their most pleasing Aspects, that Prospect only would be very far from being below the Pleasures of a wise Man.<sup>342</sup>

The observer of the weekly had a strong opinion of the moral value of the play, and the attitude was highly moralist in relation to the city life in general. *The Tatler* proposed that a post of the censor whose duty would have been to observe manners and luxury in London should be founded.<sup>343</sup> The censor had started his work: ‘I have taken many curious Surveys of this great City. I have collected into particular Bodies *the Dappers* and *the Smarts*, the *Natural* and *Affected Rakes*, the *Pretty Fellows* and the very *Pretty Fellows*.’<sup>344</sup> The list of urban figures continues: Pedants, Men of Fire, Gamesters and Politicians...It has to be learned to do more sophisticated distinctions: ‘I have separated *Cits* from *Citizens*, *Free-Thinkers* from *Philosophers*, *Wits* from *Snuff-Takers*, and *Duellists* from *Men of Honour*.’<sup>345</sup> The writer was a taxonomist of the city; his typologies created order in the chaos of the floating people and things. But the work of censor did not end here, on the contrary: ‘The Second Part of the *Roman Censor’s* Office was to look into the Manners of the People, and to check any growing Luxury, whether in Diet, Dress, or Building.’<sup>346</sup> The censor classified and corrected, acquired empirical knowledge and presents moral judgments.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, John Dryden and Alexander Pope, for instance, and later Dr. Johnson characterized London with classical allusions. Dryden extolled London’s victory over the plague and the Great Fire with ancient metaphors, and Pope called the city Augusta, which referred to the peace and order and to the promise of future greatness.<sup>347</sup> In the poem *London*, Dr. Johnson’s vision of London was saturated by classical allusions. The poem was a pastiche of Juvenal’s third satire. Johnson began by creating a contrast between an archaic periphery and the vicious and dangerous city: ‘falling houses thunder your head,/And here a female atheist talks you dead.’<sup>348</sup> The glorious past was identified with Queen Elizabeth’s era – a contrast to ‘these degenerate days’; in Greenwich ‘We kneel, and kiss the consecrated earth;/In pleasing dreams the blissful age renew.’<sup>349</sup> Through Juvenalian satire, the writer dealt

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<sup>342</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 487.

<sup>343</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 318-22.

<sup>344</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 403.

<sup>345</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 403.

<sup>346</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 403.

<sup>347</sup> Byrd 1978, 44-48; Arthur J. Weitzman, ‘Eighteenth-Century London: Urban Paradise or Fallen City?’ in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXXVI, July-Sept. 1975, Number 3, 469-471.

<sup>348</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Poems* (ed. E. L. McAdam, jr., with George Milne). New Haven and London, 1964, 48.

<sup>349</sup> Johnson, *Poems*, 49.

with all the stereotypes of the city critique: the parasite-like wealth and desperate poverty prevailed, and the author would have liked to find a place where ‘honesty and sense are no disgrace’. Johnson was never tired of London, but he observed London through moral coordinates and, unlike Boswell, he found the multiplicity of a big city morally ambiguous.<sup>350</sup> Johnson wrote on how a newcomer became familiar with London:

The attention of a new-comer is generally first struck by the multiplicity of cries that stun him in the streets, and the variety of merchandise and manufactures which the shopkeepers expose on every hand; and he is apt, by unwary bouts of admiration, to excite the merriment and contempt of those, who mistake the use of their eyes for effects of their understanding, and confound accidental knowledge with just reasoning.<sup>351</sup>

Anonymity and enormous size made possible the loosening of public morals: ‘No place but a populous city can afford opportunities for open prostitution, and where the eye of justice can attend to individuals, those who cannot be made good may be restrained from mischief.’<sup>352</sup> The quotation included an anti-metropolitan idea of community keeping its members under strict surveillance.

However, Johnson defended strongly urban civilization against the idealization of savagery – a wild Indian ‘hunts like a wild beast to satisfy his hunger’, and his quality of life is below the poorest beggar in a civilized society<sup>353</sup> – and sometimes Johnson is, in a very Boswellian manner, fascinated by London’s wealth, although the intellectual pleasures of London were always the first priority for Johnson: in London, a man ‘gains leisure for intellectual pleasures, and enjoys the happiness of reason and reflection’.<sup>354</sup> But in the end, Johnson concluded that a man of judgment should see through the glory and bustle of the world; his gaze could see ‘through the thin veils of fortune or of fashion, will discover meanness in the highest stations, and dignity of the meanest; and find that no man can become venerable but by virtue, or contemptible but by wickedness.’<sup>355</sup>

James Thomson, one of so called graveyard poets, who influenced young Boswell as a poet, saw the public places and entertainments artificial, joyless and destructive in the poem *Winter*:

The city swarms intense. The public haunt,  
Full of each theme and warm with mixed discourse,

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<sup>350</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler*, Vol. II, 208-9.

<sup>351</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Idler and Adventurer* (ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt and L. F. Powell). New Haven and London, 1963, 384.

<sup>352</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler*, Vol. III, 145.

<sup>353</sup> Johnson, *Idler and Adventurer*, 388.

<sup>354</sup> Johnson, *Idler and Adventurer*, 389.

<sup>355</sup> Johnson, *Idler and Adventurer*, 386.



Hums indistinct. The sons of riot flow  
 Down the loose stream of false enchanted joy  
 To swift destruction. On the rankled soul  
 The gaming fury falls; and in one gulf  
 Of total ruin, honour, virtue, peace,  
 Friends, families, and fortune headlong sink.

The simple entertainments of a rustic village were compared with ones in the city: 'Rustic mirth goes round –/The simple joke that takes the shepherd's heart,/ Easily pleased; the long laugh sincere.'<sup>356</sup> In the late eighteenth century, London was not only a locale of concrete dangers and vices but the vicissitude of the city began to receive a metaphysical tone; in William Blake's visions, the big city became a metaphor for civilisation which had lost its values and direction: 'I wander through each chartered street/Near where the chartered Thames does flow,/And mark in every face I meet/Mark of weakness, marks of woe.'<sup>357</sup> In the corrupted civilization, the most fragile elements of humanity, childhood and womanhood, were under threat: 'But most through midnight streets I hear/How the youthful harlot's curse/Blasts the new-born infant's tear/And blight with plagues the marriage hearse.'<sup>358</sup> Alexander Pope's noble Thames flowing through Augusta was far from this imagery.

A sternly moralistic anti-urban attitude was explicated in the satirical pamphlet *The London Unmask'd*. In the beginning, the writer introduced the idea of variety of metropolitan scene with nearly Boswellian terms: 'The streets presented the variety of objects, and though it was an early hour, such was an bustle and hurry, as plainly indicated to be, by way of the eminence, the busy world.'<sup>359</sup> But immediately the tone changed: 'But this amusing spectacle of apparent business was followed by a scene of horribly shocking to the humane beholder.'<sup>360</sup> The gaze of the observer was morally and socially distinctive; when walking the streets of London, the author who had named himself the Peripatetic, noticed a dismal scene:

A set of unfortunate wretches, male and female...A more motley group of variegated woe was never beheld; probably (thought I) the misery of the far greater part is owing to themselves; their want of industry, or want of principle, has deprived them of the power of obtaining the paltry pittance of one poor penny, with which to purchase a night's on a bed of straw in some wretched hovel.<sup>361</sup>

The writer observed the city from an outsider's viewpoint to which referred the subtitle *the New Town Spy*. The spy of the city liked to observe 'men and things as they present

<sup>356</sup> James Thomson, *Seasons and the Castle of Indolence* (ed. James Sambrook). Oxford, 1972, 145.

<sup>357</sup> William Blake, *The Complete Poems* (ed. W. H. Stevenson). London and New York, 1989, 213-4.

<sup>358</sup> Blake, *Poems*, 213-4.

<sup>359</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 8.

<sup>360</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 8.

<sup>361</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 8-9.

themselves to observation in the grand display of nature,' and the author had focused his attention towards 'the different objects that particularly existed his notice in and about the metropolis, which being, it is presumed, a world in miniature, affords ample scope for humour and sentiment.'<sup>362</sup> The Peripatetic did not pass over 'the minuteist subject that appears, worthy of notice.'<sup>363</sup>

The genre was the moral satire, but much more coarse than *The Tatler's*. The author quoted: "Eye natures walk, shoot folly as it fiels,/And catch the manners living as they rise." The writer found the multiplicity of the city exciting, but his attitude was highly ambiguous. The variety and anonymity gave the people opportunity to hide their real identities, and this was for him the source of all forms of moral corruption in London. The writer censured how "'Fine feathers make fine birds;" and persons are generally respected, where they are not personally known, according to the exterior appearance.'<sup>364</sup> The difficulty to identify people led to morally highly problematic situation because, according to the anonymous writer, fixed identity was the guarantee of credibility and truthfulness. In the contrary situation, when 'an appearance above rank and circumstance is assumed, especially in large and populous places, where obscure characters may pass from spot to spot a long time unknown and excite the esteem of the million, not for what they are, but what they seem to be. This is certainly a great incentive to vanity.'<sup>365</sup> This ambivalence was very common in the eighteenth-century texts; the anonymous crowd was threatening because of its anonymity. It provided a sheltering mask for vices and crimes and it seduced into vice because it offered an audience for the vain wanderers of the streets of London.

### *The Pleasures of the Imagination*

'And as all Pleasure depends very much on the imagination,' Boswell wrote in the essay *On Pleasure* (1781), 'and any Pleasure may, by the warm and enlivening influence of that power, be refined and exalted to a pitch far beyond what persons of dull faculties can conceive.'<sup>366</sup> The conceptions of pleasure and imagination integrated Boswell's urban experience into a highly original synthesis. His relation to London was highly aesthetic and hedonist. The crucial terms were pleasure, imagination and variety. The pursuit of pleasure has been seen as a dominating ethos in the eighteenth-century polite world; Lord Chesterfield echoed this spirit when he wrote that 'pleasure is now, and ought to be, our business'. In aesthetics, the aspect of pleasure was connected with the pursuit of beauty; the disinterested contemplation of art and the creative imagination

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<sup>362</sup> *London Unmask'd*, ii-iii.

<sup>363</sup> *London Unmask'd*, v.

<sup>364</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 43.

<sup>365</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 43-44.

<sup>366</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 212.

were the source of pleasure as the end in itself.<sup>367</sup> In eighteenth-century aesthetics, imagination was seen as an active and dynamic force which could cross the barrier between empirical facts and inner ideas. Imagination did not only make a synthesis of existing images but it was a creative force which could create new worlds. This made a distinction from classical aesthetics: mimesis changed to an active imaginative activity.<sup>368</sup>

Boswell shared the commonplace view of the Scottish Enlightenment that the material wealth, the sophistication of manners and the pursuit of luxury were beneficial as such, and the blessings of developed civilization were created for enjoyment without guilt. The rigid Calvinism of his youth had given way to the Epicurean man of the world attitude. 'In the present state of my mind,' he wrote in the essay on pleasure, 'it appears to me that variety of Pleasure is beneficial; and I contemplate with satisfaction not only the rich stores of Pleasure supplied by nature, but the numberless modes of it which human ingenuity has in the progress of time brought to such perfection.' The opulence of artificial objects was equated with the varieties of nature in Boswell's mind. He continued that 'the gratification of sight, taste, smell, and hearing, afforded by light, by colours, by diversities of shape, by fruits, by flowers, by the murmuring of waters, the hum of bees, the singing of birds, and all the objects around us.'<sup>369</sup> The pleasures of the senses and the flourish of the arts were strictly connected with material opulence. Multiplicity and variety were the central terms; the multiform world of sensual pleasures included the splendid material objects as well as the immaterial treasures of the artistic creativity:

The multiplicity of dishes and wines, the contrivance, the elegance, and the splendour of houses, furniture, and equipages. The games which amuse and interest, the treasures of literature in so many and such extensive departments, the performances of eminent Painters and Musicians, the animated intercourse of private society, the dazzling effect of publick entertainments, and the luxurious interval of repose, the finer Pleasures of imagination which Addison has so delightfully shown in *The Spectator*.<sup>370</sup>

Boswell also applied his aesthetics of variety and sophistication to cookery. 'Good cookery,' he wrote in the essay *On Luxury* (1778), 'is by no means pernicious; but on the contrary, that it is more healthful to eat French dressed dishes than ordinary roast and boiled.'<sup>371</sup> In the issues of sensual pleasures he was a Francophile, and he was sternly

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<sup>367</sup> Roy Porter, 'Enlightenment and Pleasure', in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (ed. Roy Porter and Mulvey Roberts). London, 1996, 4—12.

<sup>368</sup> James Engel, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1981, 34-37.

<sup>369</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 213-4.

<sup>370</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 213-4.

<sup>371</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 99.

critical towards Pope and his congenial souls who claimed that the sophisticated French cookery, besides of being morally dubious, was unhealthy. For Boswell, civilization was a progressive phenomenon, and he stated that the most complex and sophisticated forms of cultural development were higher than the earlier simpler levels of progress: 'In the most savage situation mankind devour their meat raw, and go naked; and from this state of brutality there is an ascent by innumerable gradations to the luxury and elegance of a company of ladies and gentlemen of high rank sitting at a dinner in London or Paris.'<sup>372</sup> Boswell shared the viewpoint of Voltaire, Hume and Smith that the pursuit of luxury promoted civilization but Boswell stated it more provocatively: according to him, ostentatious luxury, opulence, even extravaganza in dress, in food, in all which made life delightful was, besides the highest mark of the developed civilization, the basic condition for beautiful and exceptional life.

### *Variety of the Metropolis*

'MY DEAR TEMPLE, – I am indeed enjoying this Metropolis to the full, according to my taste, except I cannot, I see, have a plenary indulgence from you for Asiatic multiplicity,'<sup>373</sup> Boswell wrote to Temple on April 17, 1775. Variety and multiplicity were the central terms in Boswell's reception of London. 'I imagine a man is no more void of ideas in one place than another,' he wrote on May 21, 1763 to David Dalrymple, 'except in the case of London, which really inspires us with a rich profusion of ideas. The multiplicity of external effects tends to furnish the mind.'<sup>374</sup> Boswell applied an Addisonian figure of the *man of polite imagination* to the metropolitan experience, but he added to the "spectatorial" contemplation a strongly immediate and emotional aspect. He contemplated how different a place London was for its different inhabitants. A politician understood it as a seat government and administration; a merchant found the possibilities to an economic success; for a fop, it was a scene of pleasure and amusements. But for an intellectually sensitive mind, London was something else. In *The Life of Samuel Johnson* he wrote:

I have often amused myself with thinking how different a place London is to different people. They, whose narrow minds are contracted to the consideration of some particular pursuit, view only it through that medium. A politician thinks of it merely as the seat of government in its different departments; a grazier, as a vast market for cattle; a mercantile man, as a place where a prodigious deal is done upon 'Change; a dramattick enthusiast, as the grand scene of theatrical

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<sup>372</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 99.

<sup>373</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 150.

<sup>374</sup> James Boswell, *Letters of James Boswell*, Vol. I (ed. G. B. Tinker). Oxford, 1924, 10.

entertainments; a man of pleasure, as an assemblage of taverns, and the great emporium for ladies of easy virtue. But the intellectual man is struck with it, as comprehending the whole of human life in all its variety, the contemplation which is inexhaustible.<sup>375</sup>

The central terms were *variety* and *inexhaustible*. The attitude towards the city was contemplative – ‘Besides, the satisfaction of pursuing whatever plan is most agreeable, without being known or looked at, is very great,’ he remarked in his journal– but it included the element of immediate emotional identification.<sup>376</sup> The young Boswell had arrived London: ‘The noise, the crowd, the glare of shops and signs agreeably confused me.’<sup>377</sup> The multiple objects and variety of sensations produced a state of mind which is a mixture of agitation and pleasure. He remarked in his journal:

In reality, a person of small fortune who has only the common views of life and would just be as well as anybody else, cannot like London. But a *person of imagination and feeling*, such as The Spectator finely describes, can have the most lively enjoyment from the sight of external objects without regard to the property at all. London is undoubtedly a place where where men and manners may be seen in the greatest advantage. *The liberty* and the *whim* that reigns there occasions a variety of perfect and curious characters. Then the *immense crowd* and *hurry and bustle of business and diversion*, the great number of public places and entertainment, the noble churches and superb buildings of different kinds, agitate, amuse, and elevate the mind. ...Here a young man of curiosity and observation may have a sufficient fund of present entertainment, and may lay up ideas to employ his mind in age.<sup>378</sup>

Boswell wrote in 1775 in his journal how London was ‘a vast museum of all objects...and I think with a kind of wonder that I see it for nothing.’<sup>379</sup> The spaces of the metropolis were the scenes of multiplicity. This refers to the incommensurableness of objects, people, lifestyles and values, to the polyphonic reality without any given coordinates and hierarchies. Boswell wrote how all the objects offered to the senses were the source of pleasure, and plenitude, variety and difference were strongly positive observations – without any overtone of fear, threat or losing the self. The big city was an endless ocean of things and people but clearly the writer thought he was capable of orientate in it.

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<sup>375</sup> Boswell, *The Life*, Vol. I, 1946, 261.

<sup>376</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 69.

<sup>377</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 44.

<sup>378</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 68-9 (it. MK).

<sup>379</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 111.

‘My happiness when last in London seems a delirium,’<sup>380</sup> Boswell wrote down in 1784. Sometimes he felt that the fascination of London could grow too intense. ‘I said it was a misfortune to have too lively an imagination’,<sup>381</sup> he recorded in 1779, and he returned to the topic a few years before his death: ‘The truth is that *imaginary* London, gilded with all the brilliancy of warm fancy as I have viewed it, and London as a scene of real business, are quite different; and as the *changes* of fanciful sensation are very painful, it is more comfortable to have a duller sensation in reality.’<sup>382</sup> The young Boswell had recently moved to London and had seen the play *The Jovial Crew* in the Covent Garden gallery. He was in high spirits because the music ‘recalled in the most lively colours to my imagination the time when I was first in London, when all was new to me, when I felt the warm glow of youthful feeling and was full of curiosity and wonder.’<sup>383</sup> The opulence of the metropolis could be even dangerous, because it excited the mind to the limits of ecstasy: ‘I then had at times a degree of ecstasy of feeling that the experience which I have since had has in some measure cooled and abated.’<sup>384</sup> Boswell recognized the point of contact between outer experience and inner self-control; the spectacular experience of the myriad sensations demanded the active relation to the self. Boswell compared his state of mind during the first visit with his present disposition: ‘But then my ignorance at that time is infinitely excelled by the knowledge and moderation and government of myself which I have now acquired’.<sup>385</sup> Occasionally Dr. Johnson warned the younger colleague of excessive enthusiasm of London. ‘I wish you would a little correct or restrain your imagination, and imagine that happiness, such as life admits, may be had at other places as well as London’, the older friend wrote in a letter and referred to Stoicism: ‘Without asserting Stoicism, it may be said, that it is our business to exempt ourselves as much as we can from the power of external things. There is but one solid basis of happiness; and that is, the reasonable hope for a happy futurity. This may be had every where.’<sup>386</sup>

The orientation in London required, according to Boswell, certain mental qualities but they were not the moral ones. It was a question of taste, self control and codes of behaviour in the floating and multiple world. The experience of London was a school for understanding the multiplicity of the human world. In his journal, Boswell compared the experience of the metropolis with the experience of music:

I observed that one who has not seen London has not seen human life, and therefore should not pretend to judge of it. One who has learnt the few notes

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<sup>380</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 261.

<sup>381</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 128.

<sup>382</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 31.

<sup>383</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 141.

<sup>384</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 141.

<sup>385</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 141.

<sup>386</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, Vol. III (ed. Bruce Redford). Princeton, NJ, 1992, 119.

of a song is no judge of the great compass of music. So one who has not been in London knows a very little of life. He knows not the extent, the variety of combinations. This metaphorical representation may be enlarged. He knows not the *power*, the *force* of a large body of sound. He knows not how there may be no danger of weariness from uniformity, since the same sounds may be very seldom repeated.<sup>387</sup>

Power and variety were the central terms. London included the whole spectrum of the human life, but only a person who was accustomed to it and who had a refined sensibility to receive all the nuances could fully enjoy the metropolitan pleasures. As a man of pleasure, Boswell compared the London scene with a dinner party: an unaccustomed person could not orient to confusing multiplicity, but the real man of the town had fashioned his judgment to deal with this variety. ‘I observed that when a man comes to London as a stranger, he is confused and knows not well to how to do; like one at a great table who is unaccustomed to it and whose attention is distracted by the variety of dishes’, Boswell noted in his journal in 1772, and he required that his Londoner had a certain nonchalance or *sprezzatura* towards the metropolitan scene: ‘Whereas one settled in London is like a man accustomed to a great table, upon whom the variety of dishes makes no impression, and who singles out his piece of beef or mutton or any particular dish which he likes without being in the least disturbed.’<sup>388</sup>

The metropolis required the fashioning of the mental qualities, because the multiple sensations could confuse the unaccustomed mind. According to Boswell, a man needed a certain Stoic mastery of oneself to orient in the metropolis. He wrote in his journal:

I was resolved to maintain a calm mastery of myself this time in London, and not to go as giddy as usual...I was not to allow myself to think that I ought to be in such a multiplicity of scenes as I generally come to look upon as necessary. For as I might very well have been in none of them, every one in which I now was to be was *d'autant gagné*.<sup>389</sup>

He compared the urban experience in London with the dosage of a medicine: ‘I resolved to take London as one takes mercury; to intermit the use of it whenever I should feel it affect my brain, as one intermits the use of mercury when it affects the mouth.’ Boswell remarked in his journal how he was ‘struck with agreeable wonder and admiration by contemplating the immensity of the metropolis and the multitude of objects; above all, by the number and variety of people; and all melancholy was as clearly dissipated as if it had never existed in my mind.’<sup>390</sup> For Boswell, the multiplicity of London was not a source of anguish and moral ambiguities, but the spring of

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<sup>387</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 272.

<sup>388</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 63—4.

<sup>389</sup> *Extremes*, 220.

<sup>390</sup> *Extremes*, 220.



aesthetic, sometimes ecstatic pleasure. However, to be a Londoner demanded the right disposition, the fashioning of the imaginative self, cultivating the mental qualities for encountering the myriad sensations of London. This aesthetic and immediate acceptance of the multiplicity of the big city, which did not include any moralist overtones, differed strictly from the eighteenth-century mainstream attitudes, but it had manifest resemblances with the nineteenth-century dandyism and *flânerie*.

### III LUXURY AND SPECTACLE

The young Boswell calculated his public appearance in London where he had just moved: 'Sometimes I considered that a fine lodging denoted a man of great fashion, but then I thought that few people would see it and therefore the expense would be hid, whereas my business was to make as much show as I could with my small allowance'.<sup>391</sup> Boswell had found London and the city life in general as a scene of spectacle, and he himself wanted to be a part of this extravaganza.

I will examine the spectacular dimension of Boswell's urban experience through five principal themes. First, he was thoroughly dazzled by the courtly splendour which he met in Germany and the magnificence he encountered in the London fashionable society. Boswell's social snobbery was exceptionally open: he was totally susceptible to the enchantment of rank, title and the splendour of outward appearance. The attitude towards court and the courtly culture was a highly distinctive topic in the eighteenth-century British discussions. Thirdly, Boswell's sartorial code was conspicuously opposite to 'spectatorial' modesty and reservation; the pursuit of pomp and brilliance was the dominant tone in his remarks on clothing. Fourthly, he admired, on the one hand, Baroque architecture and was fascinated by the magnificence and geometrical order of the Continental residential cities as well as the grandeur of the British noble residencies. However, he was also strongly enchanted by the fantastic Gothic design. Fifthly, Boswell's sacral experience was dominated by the splendour of clerical architecture and the solemn formality of Anglican and Roman Catholic ceremonies.

The content of Boswell's urban experience was strongly loaded with early modern courtly values, manners, tastes and predilections, but the form or mode of experience was fundamentally romantic because of its emotional identification, enthusiasm, lack of rational and critical distance.

#### *Fashionable Vanities*

The Court was the core of representative publicness, and from the perspective of eighteenth-century social satire it was the centre of corruption, effeminacy and debauchery. In Britain, the court did not dominate the cultural and social scene as it did on the Continent, and the republican court critical tradition was still existent. The satirical pamphlet *The Midnight Spy* (1766) crystallised the falsity of the courtly life:

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<sup>391</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 58.

‘At court, they are striving for titles, places and pensions; here prevail, in the highest degree, vanity, pride and dissimulation, nor can the face hardly be considered as the index of mind.’<sup>392</sup> Courtly immorality was standard material of social satire, and the repulsion was strengthened by the splendid courtly life of the archenemy France.

The pamphlet *London Unmask’d* offered a typical though coarse argumentation. The author who called himself the ‘Peripatetic’ saw the court as a kind of school for life because ‘the experience of courts, considered as the rendezvous of the great, afford much knowledge of the world, and teaches more useful lessons than the best library that can possibly be collected.’ But the lessons of the court were bitter ones: ‘the stateliness of buildings, the elegance of furniture, the grandeur of monarchs, the brilliancy of a levee, and all the glittering ornaments which attend a throne, are apt to disturb our quiet, infuse envious and ambitious thoughts, and ever cause us to aspire to rival the courtier in all his honours and dignities.’ The rivalry of the court was a corruptive element, and although the courtly scene offered a dazzling performance, it destroyed the sane judgment: ‘The sumptuous banquets of that bewitching spot take off our relish for the homely fare of our own tables; the splendour of equipage dazzles our eyes...the whole scene collected in one view, sets our brains a madding; and has, in all ages, been the destruction of many. ...Finally, the courtly scene was ‘nothing more than a dream; and when we are rouzed from the delusive reverie, we discover its folly and fallacy.’<sup>393</sup> The court was a pernicious delusion which dispelled solid moral and mental coordinates.

The courtly milieu with its special amusements was a target of Addison and Steele’s social satire. Vanity, empty formalism and uncritical aping of continental influences were the central themes in this respect. Steele wrote on the *levées* of the great: ‘These Worthies are got into an habit of being Servile with an Air, and enjoy a certain Vanity in being known they can rise early, go abroad sleek and well dressed, with no other Hope or Purpose but to make a Bow to a Man in Court Favour’. The courtly system of dependencies which generated false politeness and encouraged vanity was the main corruptive element in the eyes of Addison and Steele, and in this sense they continued the seventeenth-century Republican court critique. The unnatural sociability was the pointless interchange between disguised men:

It is wondrous that a Man can get over the Natural Existence and Possession of his own Mind so far, as to take delight either in paying or receiving such cold and repeated Civilities. But what maintains the Humour is, that outward Show is what most Men pursue, rather than real Happiness. Thus both the Idol and Idolater equally impose upon themselves in pleasing their Imaginations this way.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Anonymous, *The Midnight Spy, or a View of the Transactions of London and Westminster*. London, 1766, 15.

<sup>393</sup> *London unmask’d*, 86-9.

<sup>394</sup> *The Spectator* II, 257.

From Steele's, and also the Peripatetic's common-sense point of view, the illusory character of the courtly milieu dissolved the line between truth and false and seduced people to vain spectacle instead of the real world. The vainest of all vain courtly spectacles was the Italian opera, the craze of fashionable society in the first decades of the eighteenth century. In the attitudes towards this form of fashionable amusement several central themes of the moralist court critic were connected: effeminacy (castrati were a special topic of satire), pompous luxury, public show based on pure appearance, and a suspicious continental origin.<sup>395</sup> Also for Addison and Steele, highly civilized and relatively broad-minded men, Italian opera was too much. 'An Opera,' Addison wrote in *The Spectator*, 'may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its Decorations, as its only Design is to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience.' The pure sensuality without stern moral substance made this form of art suspicious, if not worthless, and the whimsicality and irrational turns of the plot were contradictory to the requirements of demands of the adult reason: 'Common Sense however requires, that there should be nothing in the Scenes and Machines which may appear Childish and Absurd. How would the Wits of King *Charles's* Time have laughed to have seen *Nicolini* [1673-1732; a Neapolitan contralto] exposed to a Tempest in Robes of Ermin, and sailing in an open Boat upon a Sea of Paste-Board?'<sup>396</sup> According to Henrik Knif, Addison and Steele offered a 'commonsensical coffee-house vision of life' to its middle class readers which 'permitted people to smile at the excesses of the fashionable world', and the Italian opera had a privileged position in this social satire.<sup>397</sup>

Addison was not at all a Puritan hostile towards sensual pleasures; on the contrary, his series of essays on the pleasures of the imagination is one of the basic texts of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. But somewhere there was a limit between the irrational extravagance and the calm and reasonable way of enjoying aesthetic objects. In *The Spectator*, Addison wrote on the wretched taste of Nicolini's audience, and he expressed the wish that '...our Tragedians would copy after this great Master in Action. Could they make the same use of their Arms and Legs, and inform their Faces with as significant Looks and Passions, how glorious would an *English* Tragedy appear with that Action which is capable of giving a Dignity to the forced Thoughts, cold Conceits, and unnatural Expressions of an *Italian* Opera.'<sup>398</sup> The terms forced, cold, and unnatural were highly illuminating; Addison and Steele were classicists, of course, and so their conception of the nature was very different from the later Romantic point of view but the artificiality of opera a very strange phenomenon to the common sense and moderation represented by the authors of the moral weeklies. The main target of the

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<sup>395</sup> See Henrik Knif, *Gentlemen and Spectators: Studies in Journals, Opera, and Social Scene in Late Stuart London*. Helsinki, 1995.

<sup>396</sup> *The Spectator* I, 22-23.

<sup>397</sup> Knif 1995, 37-8.

<sup>398</sup> *The Spectator* I, 59.

opera bashing was not, of course, the music but the theatrical, spectacular and extravagant features typical to the Baroque and Rococo courtly culture.

### *The Magnificence of Courts*

‘Soleure pleases me because it is the first place I have come to mentioned by Mr. Addison in his Travels. I just take a contrary route from his’, the young Boswell wrote in Switzerland.<sup>399</sup> This remark illustrated well the intellectual routes of the two men: Boswell, the grand admirer of the Augustan man of letters from childhood, had from the earliest remarks dissociated from some central principles of the spectatorial ethos. Enthusiastic attitude towards court and high society was a permanent feature in Boswell’s disposition. On May 8, 1762, the young Boswell wrote from Auchinleck to his friend Andrew Erskine in a blissful mood: ‘The sunshine is mild, the breeze is gentle, my mind is peaceful. I am indulging the most agreeable reveries imaginable.’<sup>400</sup> The imagery floated far away from the austere Scottish soil: ‘I am thinking of the brilliant scenes, of happiness, which I shall enjoy as an officer of the guards. How I shall be acquainted with *all grandeur of court*, and all *the elegance of dress and diversion*.’ The central components of this sunny future plan were aesthetic pleasures and the myriad delights of the fashionable world, not forgetting the very important acquaintances: ‘become a favourite of ministers of state, and the adoration of ladies of quality, beauty, and fortune!’ he wrote to Erskine, ‘how many parties of pleasure shall I have in town!’<sup>401</sup> The tone did not change with the years: ‘I was in fine spirits and full of courtly ideas,’ Boswell remarked eight years before his death.<sup>402</sup>

Politically Boswell was a steady monarchist and Tory; his belief in hereditary rank, the natural inequality of men and High Church Anglicanism was unwavering. According to Frank Brady, Boswell’s approach to politics was always ‘conservative, idealistic, and emotional’.<sup>403</sup> Boswell’s Monarchism was highly aesthetic by nature; he had a natural and unconditional confidence in the traditional political and social order but what was really fascinating in the Monarchical system for him was its spectacular choreography of power. It fed Boswell’s insatiable imagination with visions of splendour, magnificence and elegance, which the common sense man Richard Steele would have called delusion. In Boswell’s eyes, republics had a bad record in this issue. ‘I cannot be of opinion,’ he wrote in the essay *On Luxury* (1778), ‘that the luxury and

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<sup>399</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 204.

<sup>400</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 104-105.

<sup>401</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 105-5 (it. MK).

<sup>402</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 134.

<sup>403</sup> Frank Brady, *Boswell’s Political Career*. New Haven and London, 1965, 32; see Thomas Crawford, ‘Politics in the Boswell-Temple Correspondence’, in *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters* (ed. Irma S. Lustig). Lexington, KY, 1995, 101—117.

magnificence and elegance in building, in planting, in dress and equipage, and in all the fine arts, ought to be at all discouraged; for I think that all these kinds of luxury promote diligence and activity, and lively enjoyment, without being at all hurtful.’ Then Boswell criticized the sumptuary laws of the modern republics like Venice, Lucca and Ferrara: ‘I remember, that when I was at Lucca, the strange regulation that the citizens of that state shall appear drest only in black, appeared to me to be an ill-judged as well as a very dull negative provision.’ The highly developed civilization encouraged plurality and splendour because the human happiness was strongly connected with imagination and its possibilities to express itself in various and magnificent forms. ‘Surely a society of human beings,’ he argued in the essay, ‘who present to each other only a dusky uniformity, is not so happy as a society where invention is exerted, and taste displayed, in all the varieties of forms and colours which are to be seen in *splendid courts and brilliant assemblies*.’<sup>404</sup>

Boswell connected the ‘varieties of forms and colours’ with the courtly milieu and this was not an accident: from the earliest notes, court had been the centre of the full and civilized life in his imagination; in a way, the court and the city were merged in his sensitive mind; both were characterized with terms like variety, splendour, vivacity, elegance and magnificence. The court was a kind of crystallisation of fashionable city life; the essence of civilization was to be found among mirrors, velvet and busts of the assembly rooms. A delight with the public grandeur was mixed with the aesthetic of variety and imagination. In spite of its relative modesty, the scene of the homely British monarchy could sometimes satisfy Boswell’s longing of magnificence. ‘Then went and saw the King and Queen pass from the Opera, and then saw the Guards drawn up in the court of the Palace while the moon shone and showed their splendour. I was all gentle felicity,’ he wrote down in 1762.<sup>405</sup> He did not assume the identity of a passive and invisible observer but he found himself as an active participant in the courtly spectacle, as a man to be seen. ‘In a full suit of black clothes [in a barrister’s court suit] went to His Majesty’s levee,’ he noted in May 1787, ‘where I had not been since I brought my family to London. I wished to observe how he behaved to me, as I thought of presenting a memorial to him to have some mark of his royal favour to me. It was a delightful day.’<sup>406</sup> In 1763 in London, Boswell and his friend Temple had gone to see the landing of Venetian ambassadors: ‘It was very elegant to see the fine barges; and then the procession of their coaches, music, and attendants was exceedingly splendid.’<sup>407</sup> The stern Venetian formalism was an animating breeze from the vanishing epoch. ‘This day being the Queen’s birthday, I was amused by seeing multitudes of rich-dressed people driving in their splendid equipages to Court’, wrote the young Boswell in the *London Journal*, and in the enthusiastic spirits he continued that ‘a court is a fine thing. It is the

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<sup>404</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 58 (it. MK).

<sup>405</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 53.

<sup>406</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 134.

<sup>407</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 242.

cause of so much show and splendour that people are kept gay and spirited.<sup>408</sup> He returned to the romantic past of his native Scotland. The nostalgia for the archaic past merged with the actual experience of the fashionable court life when he continued that ‘I recollected all the stories of the old Scottish magnificence when our monarchs at Holyroodhouse, and I wished to see such days again.’<sup>409</sup>

In his pamphlet, *Reflections on the Late Alarming Bankruptcies in Scotland* (1772) Boswell followed the ethos of the early modern code of “noble magnificence” according to which conspicuous consumption was justifiable, or rather necessary, among the aristocratic social rank. The writer remembered the time when ‘no body dined or supped at our houses...except the houses of men of high rank, or in public offices, who were therefore obliged, in point of decorum, and for the purposes of good policy, to give entertainments to large and general companies.’<sup>410</sup> The absence of a court was the principal reason for the decay of strict social distinctions which had so vital importance for developed civilization. Boswell quoted an anonymous French writer: “‘In a monarchical state, are two orders, essentially separate and distinct, the nobles and the plebeians: the functions of the former are to defend it; those of the latter to feed and enrich it, without ever aspiring to useless honours, which are not made for them.’”<sup>411</sup> Boswell never condemned luxury and extravagance *per se* but, according to him, the spreading of conspicuous consumption among lower social strata was a suspicious phenomenon; when the men of lower rank were content with their position, they ‘may be esteemed as reputable men in their station, while they remain in their own places with contentment and quietness, and do not fret their minds by a vain and restless contention for equality.’<sup>412</sup> Boswell condemned the people who have used borrowed feathers and ‘have lived with a degree of elegance, becoming in people of first rank, but ridiculous and offensive men of low extraction: Such unprincipled men having been entrusted with the money of numbers, and with the *all* of some, have villanously consumed it, and involved their creditors in the same ruin, though not in the same guilt, with themselves.’<sup>413</sup>

Luxury itself was not a problem; the problem was that the differences between estates had blurred and the wrong people had adopted conspicuous consumption. ‘The mischief,’ Boswell wrote in the pamphlet, ‘is, that for some years past there has been in Scotland an abominable spirit of levelling all those distinctions which ages of civilized society have, through all the gradations politeness introduced amongst mankind.’<sup>414</sup> In his view, the court was the centre of gravity which had kept the ancient order of estates in force; when this magnetic impact had ceased, the manners had loosened and the

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<sup>408</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 148.

<sup>409</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 148.

<sup>410</sup> James Boswell, *Reflections on the Late Alarming Bankruptcies in Scotland*. Edinburgh, 1772, 11.

<sup>411</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 9-10.

<sup>412</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 10.

<sup>413</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 4-5.

<sup>414</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 7.



foundations of the social order had been shaken: ‘Ever since the seat of government has been removed from among us, we have been increasing in riches and barbarity, as a body in proportion as it grows fat becomes coarse. ... And hence it has happened that there is no distinction of tables, as there is no distinction of ranks’.<sup>415</sup> Boswell sharpened his point by referring ironically to Hesiod: ‘This, though an iron age in vengeance, in the true sense of the expression, is, in one respect, a golden age; for gold is the object on which all inclinations are fixed.’<sup>416</sup> The spirit of equality had dissolved the qualitative differences between social ranks, and the materialistic ethos had created an illusion that the originally exclusive forms of civilization were within the reach of all who had sufficient material resources and so ‘all must have an equal number of dishes, all must have wines equally costly, as all think themselves equally *gentlemen*’.<sup>417</sup> It seems obvious that Boswell did not share the opinion that the commercialization of culture encouraged the refinement of manners. On the contrary, he was confirmed that ‘our gentlemen of the last age were much more polite than those of the present.’<sup>418</sup> Boswell enjoyed the commercial pleasures of London, like pleasure gardens and theatres, but it seems that he could not see any connection between them and the commercial expansion. He lived in a semi-fictitious aristocratic world where the age-old distinctions of rank were mixed with modern metropolitan pleasures.

‘In a day or two I am to set out for Berlin,’ Boswell wrote from Holland to Temple in 1764, ‘I shall be presented at the different courts upon the very best footing. I shall acquire real knowledge as well as elegance of behaviour in the company of a politician and a courtier.’<sup>419</sup> For Boswell, German princely courts, where he visited on his grand tour in 1764, were a kind of school for the *haute monde*, and it was obvious that he wanted to learn worldly manners in a relatively familiar milieu. He remembered his rank as an Old Scots Baron and he calculated that ‘a Scots baron cannot do better than travel in Germany.’<sup>420</sup> Italy and France were over-civilized; there nature was ‘quite destroyed’ and people had grown in so artificial milieu that the ‘true manly character’ was ‘melted into elegant ease’.<sup>421</sup> This was a curious comment from Boswell who had always admired complex and sophisticated forms of life, but it seemed that Gallicized German courts offered him a suitable mixture of the foreign and familiar. In Germany, the Scots baron could ‘acquire French and polite manners, and at the same time be with people who live much in the same style that he must do at home’.<sup>422</sup> What was most

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<sup>415</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 7-8.

<sup>416</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 8.

<sup>417</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 8.

<sup>418</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 12.

<sup>419</sup> James Boswell, *Boswell in Holland, 1763—1764* (ed. Frederick A. Pottle). London, 1952, 275.

<sup>420</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 109.

<sup>421</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 109.

<sup>422</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 109.

important, the Scots baron ‘may thus learn to support his character with dignity, and upon his paternal estate may have the felicity of a prince’.<sup>423</sup>

‘This was a grand court day.’<sup>424</sup> This exclamation could be the motto of Boswell’s German journey. From the very beginning, the splendid milieu of the German princely courts had an enormous mental effect on highly sensitive Boswell; and after completing the Grand Tour in German courts he summarized that ‘at all of them I found state and politeness’. He wrote to his friend Temple from Berlin where he had become acquainted with the milieu of the Prussian monarch: ‘You see me now, Temple, restored to myself, quite *The Great Man*.’<sup>425</sup> The monarchical impact was an instrument in Boswell’s self-fashioning project; the strong emotional and aesthetic sensations which he experienced during his journey left permanent marks on his identity. The first resort was the court of Brunswick – ‘I then went to the Reigning Court. The palace is ancient, and the rooms filled me with respect.’<sup>426</sup> – and this visit defined the tone of the journey. It was illustrative that Boswell who in theory emphasized formalities and reserve in his reflections on politeness, took the courtly compliments very personally: ‘After supper the Duke of Brunswick honoured me with a pretty long conversation, and I am sure that his Highness was pleased’. The lack of critical distance was manifest in Boswell’s courtly discourse; the enthusiastic tone was not changed since the early letter to Erskine: ‘Here now I find myself in the very sphere of magnificence. I live with princes, and a court is my home. I took leave of the Duke, and a cordial adieu of all the courtiers. I found myself already liked by them with affection.’<sup>427</sup>

Boswell did not know in every respect the milieu he described. He could not see through the surface of the world he depicted, and it is possible that he did not want to either. On the contrary, he liked to experience immediate sensations, not to see the forces functioning behind the surface level. Boswell’s identification with the courtly milieu was both personal and emotional; he sought passionately an affective disposition, and in a way he felt he existed in a field of emotional forces which were in constant change: ‘I was next presented to all the Grands, &c., and to the Dames d’honneur. Next the Duke came out, to whom I was presented, and next to the Duchess.’<sup>428</sup> Boswell used a very strong terminology to illustrate the electrifying impact of the courtly milieu; the apollonian figures of the court possessed magical qualities which made an indelible impression on the sensitive Scotsman: ‘I was quite struck to find myself at table in the Palace of Brunswick, with that illustrious family. I sat opposite to Prince Ferdinand, whose presence inspires animated respect. He absolutely electrified me. Every time that I looked at him, I felt a noble shock.’<sup>429</sup> The tour continued in the same tone. A courtly

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<sup>423</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 109-110.

<sup>424</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 173.

<sup>425</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 32.

<sup>426</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 14-15.

<sup>427</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 15.

<sup>428</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 15.

<sup>429</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 12.

dinner in Dessau had ended and the feeling was celestial. A dramatic princess dominated the scene, and it seems that Boswell had forgotten entirely the Addisonian and Johnsonian coffee-house code: ‘After dinner I waited on Princesse Wilhelmine, aunt to the Prince. She was a large, jolly princess, very high and mighty, but her pride was of the best kind. It did not show itself in silent disdain but *in splendid magnificence*.’<sup>430</sup> Modesty, reason and moderation, the central virtues of the Augustan humanists, or authenticity, sincerity and naturalness, the key concepts of the age of sentiment, did not have any role here. In the representative courtly milieu, splendour, magnificence, even extravagance had a strongly positive role, and Boswell accepted passionately this ethos.

The electoral court of Saxony was one of the pinnacles of the journey. The Baroque city Dresden had a magical aura in his eyes, and he found the courtly life in the magnificent residential city highly fascinating: ‘I went to the French *comédie*, which is very pretty here. I saw the Elector, Prince Xavier, and several more of the Court. I was enlivened with new ideas.’<sup>431</sup> Next day the social choreography continued. Boswell hoped to be presented as a British officer: ‘I accordingly put a cockade in my hat and tied a crape round my arm, and was presented at the Court of Saxony as “an officer in Loudoun’s regiment”...‘It was a great palace. The Court went from room to room, I believe to visit different princes,’<sup>432</sup> he noted in his journal. It was revealing that the distinctions typical to the British court discourse were totally non-existent in Boswell’s remarks: he did not refer to the effeminate impacts of the court; not to the corruptive features of conspicuous consumption; not to the disastrous economical consequences of the reckless squandering; not to the system of unsymmetrical dependencies, which had been found highly corruptive in the British republican discussion; and most importantly, not to the absolutist form of government as a tyranny.

The most important destinations as a matter of course were Berlin and Potsdam, the capital and the residence of the kingdom of Prussia. In the centre of the Prussian court existed the mystical though virtually invisible ruler Frederick the Great. The King made an enormous impact on Boswell’s royalist mind, but later he wrote an exceptionally critical remark. He was horrified by Frederick’s brutal use of force in the Seven Years War. Having seen the ruins of Dresden he wrote: ‘It gave me great pain to see the ruins made by the Prussian bombardments. I hated the barbarous hero. He was under no necessity to bombard Dresden.’<sup>433</sup> It is obvious that in the background of Boswell’s verdict was the ethos of benevolence, not any kind of anti-royalist stance. Although he believed without reservations in the traditional order of rank and in the political and social – and intellectual – inequality of men, in the humanitarian issues he

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<sup>430</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 106 (it MK).

<sup>431</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 131-2.

<sup>432</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 133.

<sup>433</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 129.

was a typical representative of the British Enlightenment: the mutual benevolence and gentleness towards the fellow beings were a self-evident standpoint for him.

‘We went and saw the garden of Charlottenburg, which is spacious and elegant’, wrote Boswell in Berlin a very typical remark: the first impressions in Potsdam and Berlin were the aesthetic splendour and social refinement of the courtly milieu.<sup>434</sup> ‘Madame de Froment and I,’ he noted in his journal, ‘dined tête-à-tête, after which we went and were shown the Palace, which is magnificent. The King’s concert-room is very elegant.’<sup>435</sup> Boswell was well informed about the King’s exceptional intellect, and the visit to Sans Souci confirmed this. ‘We looked through a glass door and saw his bedchamber and a neat little library. All his books were bound in red Turkey and handsomely gilt,’ Boswell wrote when he had seen the works of Voltaire and Frederick, and he noted, ‘Great and pleasing were my thoughts.’<sup>436</sup> Gradually Boswell approached the object of his admiration, the King of Prussia: ‘I then went to the Parade. I saw the King. It was a glorious sight’.<sup>437</sup> There was some original and unchallenged *Urkraft* in the King: ‘As a loadstone moves needles, or a storm bows the lofty oaks, did Frederick the Great make the Prussian officers submissive bend as he walked majestic in the midst of them. ‘I was in noble spirits, and had a full relish of this grand scene which I shall never forget.’<sup>438</sup> The enchantment continued in a dinner party where Boswell was ‘only a simple spectator’ and there he had ‘a full view of the King. I was very well amused.’<sup>439</sup> Later he wrote to Henri de Catt after having seen the King in the Parade: ‘I have already had the honour of seeing His Majesty two or three times. Imagination may do much, but I am sure that he has an aspect of superior guise. Upon my soul, I was struck. He electrified me. Every time I looked at him, I felt the shock of the heroic.’ Boswell referred to his exceptional mental disposition when he wrote that M. Catt’s blood did not circulate as rapidly as his.<sup>440</sup>

Boswell did not write very much about music but he was very impressed when he first listened to the ‘the most pathetic expression set to the tenderest music’ of the Italian opera.<sup>441</sup> The Italian opera was a vital element of the courtly and fashionable scene of eighteenth-century Europe. This form of courtly spectacle had a highly stimulating impact on Boswell. In Brunswick he had gone to the opera which he described as ‘very noble’. The opera house was huge and the decorations were ‘much finer than in London’. The piece of opera was an Italian one called *Enea in Lazona*. ‘A bold manly voice’ of a singer struck the young Scotsman ‘prodigiously’ and Boswell confessed that he had never been ‘so much affected by music’ and his ‘hypochondriac

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<sup>434</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 29.

<sup>435</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 17.

<sup>436</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 17.

<sup>437</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 23.

<sup>438</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 23.

<sup>439</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 29.

<sup>440</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 31.

<sup>441</sup> Martin 1999, 96.

deadness' was away. Besides the music, the enchanting milieu was an important reason for this mental reaction: 'How happy am I now! I dined at Court, and after this noble opera I returned to Court and supped elegant and grand.'<sup>442</sup>

The German grand tour was full of the splendid dinners and assemblies, as in the court of Brunswick where there was 'a prodigious company to dine at Court, and a most magnificent dinner. ... Grand music played in an apartment adjoining, and round the table was a vast crowd of spectators. I confess that I was supremely elevated.'<sup>443</sup> Suddenly, the elegant and grandiose sociability contrasted with the gloomy Presbyterianism of native Scotland: 'I had the utmost pleasure of contrast by considering at this hour is assembled Auchinleck kirk and many a whine and many a sad look is found therein.'<sup>444</sup> Soon the shadow went away and Boswell hoped that he would never 'encourage a least gloomy idea of religion' and that he would be 'firm and cheerful'.<sup>445</sup> Sometimes Boswell's courtly enthusiasm reached to the celestial spheres. He had attended a Sunday concert in the Duke's Chapel in Brunswick where he had heard 'a psalm performed with magnificent music, eunuchs and other singers from the opera, an organ, a French horn, flutes, fiddles, trumpets. It was quite heaven.' Boswell wrote how he adored God after the occasion and 'hoped for immortal joy'.<sup>446</sup> The atmosphere in the court of Brunswick seemed to be especially fascinating; Boswell felt there both unreserved admiration and familiar affection. 'My spirits bounded,' he noted in his journal, 'yet was I solemn, and stretched my view to the world of futurity. It was fine to be in the Palace of Brunswick, and see the illustrious family brilliant and gay, and the Prince diverting himself after his scenes of heroism.'<sup>447</sup>

Boswell's attitude towards the courtly and fashionable milieu was the one of a romantic lover: blind, passionate and enchanted. Such expressions as 'with affection', 'noble shock', 'noble spirits', 'electrified', 'struck' emphasized the strongly emotional character of Boswell's courtly experience. He did not observe the courtly milieu from the perspective of a moralist "spectator" like Addison or cynical insider like Lord Chesterfield and the Duke of Saint-Simon. On the contrary, he identified with the new milieu with naïve enthusiasm, without any critical reflection. He was an outsider who passionately wanted to be fully involved in the courtly spectacle. Boswell's courtly ethos was far from moralist or cynical observation; his naïve aestheticism could not recognize any moral or religious distinctions in the court milieu. He was like a romantic poet on a lake shore or in a ruined abbey: without distance and reservations but full of emotion.

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<sup>442</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 53.

<sup>443</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 57-58.

<sup>444</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 58.

<sup>445</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 58.

<sup>446</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 60.

<sup>447</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 60.

Indeed it is obvious that the structure of Boswell's courtly experience referred, not to the early modern court discourse, not, of course, to the court critique of the Augustan humanism, but to the early forms of Romantic subjectivism. In a letter from Germany to his close friend William Temple he found himself as a romantic extraordinary being, and he cultivated a highly exclusive cult of authentic friendship between two exceptional persons: 'Trace me only from the time when first our congenial souls united, when they separated themselves from the *profanum vulgus* ["the uncultured herd", Horace, *Odes*, III. i. I.] at college and united in elegant friendship. Since that time what variety has there been in my mind!'<sup>448</sup> The highly sensitive mental structure was a mark of the aristocracy of spirit. Boswell felt that the friends had some uncommon mental powers which could not be realized in the common frames of life:

To be plain with you, my friend, neither you nor I seem intended for making a great figure in active life. We want firmness of mind and steadiness of application. Upon my soul, I think so. No real object has arrested our view. We excel in no branch of science or of art, while our fellow collegians are jogging along the plain road and always getting on. What can this mean, Temple? What say you to it? It is certainly true; and yet it does not make me think meanly of us. No, we have brilliance of imagination, polite learning, elegance of taste and manners, and elevation of soul. Perhaps we are beings superior to this life. However, since we are placed in the world, let us make the best of it.<sup>449</sup>

In Boswell's remarks, the Augustan conceptions of 'brilliance of imagination', 'elegance of taste and manners' and 'polite learning' were seen in a very romantic illumination and they did not belong to the common humanity but to the selected few. Here we can recognize the Romantic cult of exceptional humanity and original genius in its preliminary form.

Boswell's perspective on sociability was thoroughly aesthetic and socially exclusive: physical milieu and human beings were in a way merged into a whole; they reflected the mental and aesthetic qualities of each other. 'Madame la Présidente', he noted in the journal in Germany, 'is between forty and fifty. She is still a handsome woman. She is of a genteel family. She has excellent common sense and much ease of behaviour. Yet the *bourgeoise* appears at times.'<sup>450</sup> Sometimes Boswell had doubts about his own competence to behave in a sufficiently fashionable manner. Sometimes he reflected the narrowness and clumsiness of his Scottish milieu and he realized that maybe he could not to attain the easiness of the manners of the highest society. But the situation was not hopeless. 'However, that "facility of manners" which Adam Smith allowed me,' he remarked in 1775, 'and the incidental excursions of several springs,

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<sup>448</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 32.

<sup>449</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 33.

<sup>450</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 96.

have, it seems, qualified me to pass muster wonderfully, or rather to be unobserved as an *awkward man*.<sup>451</sup> Slightly comically, Boswell included to his programme of self-cultivation the polishing of his relation to inferiors. Intercourse with the landlord required the right attitude: 'I have the art to be easy and chatty and yet maintain a proper distance.'<sup>452</sup> Little later the tone became sharper. 'I had resolved not to dine with my landlord, nor to see them much this week, in order to recover my proper dignity and distance,' he wrote in the *London Journal*.<sup>453</sup>

Although Boswell had taken great pains to fashion his self, it seems to be that self-fashioning was not enough, but the finest forms of civilization required noble birth. Mrs Cholmondeley was 'a pretty-looking woman,' the young Boswell wrote down, 'lively and entertaining, with that gay polish of manners which is only to be acquired in the genteelest company.'<sup>454</sup> Indeed, the most qualified forms of elegance belonged, in Boswell's mind, exclusively to the highest circles of fashionable society. He reflected the fashionable occasions without the cultivated irony of a worldly-wise courtier or the moralist satire of an Addisonian spectator. His attitude was the one of the dazzled observer, and the fashionable drawing-rooms were for him like the wonderland of aesthetic pleasures: 'sat a little quiet and enjoyed the scene, the *lustre* in *light* and in *genius*.'<sup>455</sup> Boswell had gone to meet his friend Colonel Gould. He was not on the premises, and so Mrs Gould kept him company. Boswell noted in his journal that she was 'a genteel, affable woman. The house was very handsome, the furniture elegant. ... I came away in the fine spirits at having got so agreeable a home.'<sup>456</sup> The visit was repeated in the next day: 'This day I dined at Colonel Gould's. I found him a sensible, genteel, obliging little man. Everything was in the best taste: quite ease and fashion. He was very kind to me... I really liked the man much.'<sup>457</sup> Spaces and milieus were often connected with the state of mind in the characterizations of the social occasions. The ageing Boswell referred to a letter of his youth to Andrew Erskine in which he dreamed on the splendid life in courts, dinner parties and assembly rooms when he wrote about the visit to Lord Palmerston:

I was charmed with Lady Palmerston's gentle, elegant appearance and manner. My Lord made an apology for having invited me without first waiting on me, but said he would certainly do it soon, and he was much obliged to me. The respectable old rooms, which belonged to his Lordship's great-grandfather Sir John Temple, brother of Sir William, the portraits, the very complete dinner and wines and attendance, pleased me highly.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 119.

<sup>452</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 81.

<sup>453</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 98.

<sup>454</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 92.

<sup>455</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 256.

<sup>456</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 64.

<sup>457</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 66.

<sup>458</sup> Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 96.



The young Boswell had waited for a long time for an invitation to the highly exclusive Northumberland House. He had begun to get anxious. 'But hearing nothing from it,' he noted in the journal in December 1762, 'I began to think that they neglected me. However, I now received a card of invitation to the rout on Tuesday the 7. This raised my spirits, gave me notions of my consequence, and filled me with grandeur.'<sup>459</sup> The account crystallized the crucial components of Boswell's experience of the fashionable society.

In the evening I went to Northumberland House, to the rout, which was indeed magnificent. Three large rooms and the gallery (a prodigious one) were full of the best company, between three and four hundred of them. The gallery is like one of the rooms in Holyroodhouse for size and richly adorned on the walls and ceiling with landscapes and gilding.<sup>460</sup>

The noble portraits where 'the King and Lady Northumberland are exhibited in full length portraits, in their robes' made Boswell's imagination to generate the most magnificent ideas of the ancient family line and the glorious feudal past of the family. In a way the magnificent milieu and the finest company reflected each other; they had the same exceptional qualities. When the young invitee was standing 'in pleasing reverie in the gallery musing on the splendid scene' and 'joining with that the ancient ideas of the family of Percy' lady Northumberland approached him with 'the greatest complacency and kindness'. She opened the conversation with a slightly ambiguous expression: "'Mr. Boswell, I am very happy to see you. How do you do? I hope you are come to settle among us. I was very sorry that I was not at home when you called. I gave positive orders that you should be admitted whenever you called.'" Boswell could not recognize the concealed meaning of the utterance, nor his position in the company, but his heart was full of delight: 'This put me into the finest humour. I thanked her sincerely. I chatted easily. She then carried me to my Lord, who was very glad to see me and very civil to me.' Instead of feeling a faint social inferiority Boswell saw he had been fully respected in the noble house, and his admiration was unstinted: 'This is indeed a noble family in every respect. They live in a most princely manner, perfectly suitable to their high rank. Yet they are easy and affable. They keep up the true figure of old English nobility.'<sup>461</sup>

Boswell's remarks about the drawing room of a certain Mr Beauclerk in 1775 were highly illustrative. In the drawing room, Boswell met some people of the highest rank, Lady Di Spencer and her brothers Lord Robert and Lord Charles Spencer. He was extremely 'pleased with seeing people of high fashion, who, though no doubt of the

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<sup>459</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 65.

<sup>460</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 70-1.

<sup>461</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 70-1.

same clay of which we are all made, have had it refined, and are like figures of Indian earth.<sup>462</sup> A long history of refining had made these noble people something special to Boswell; they were like rare and fragile objects of art.

### *Splendid Appearance*

Dress and luxury were very controversial topics in eighteenth-century Britain. In these discussions religious and moral, economic and political, cultural and gender themes intermingled. An important issue was the impact of luxury on martial virtues and manliness in general. Effeminacy was a frequently used term in these discussions: the polite sphere of life with its luxury, fine dress and aesthetic pleasures had a softening impact on manliness. Even Boswell, highly exceptionally, wrote in 1763 that ‘luxury is very dangerous...Above all things a young man should guard against effeminacy.’<sup>463</sup>

In the remarks from the Grand Tour to Germany, Boswell contemplated elegant dress and elegant appearance in a strongly French mood: ‘I have a genteel wardrobe....At ten a French fencing-master comes to me. I read an agreeable French author. I write French letters.’<sup>464</sup> British masculinity in the French context was not an uncomplicated issue in eighteenth-century Britain. Foppery was a general topic in British social satire, and the phenomenon was strongly connected with unwelcome Continental cultural influences. The pursuit of over-elegant appearance was a symptom of a soft and effeminate character, and vice versa, it encouraged these features. Softness and effeminacy was the product of the Continental court culture where the asymmetrical dependencies encouraged servility, and servility made people call all their attention to the amiable outer appearance. The strong presence of women in the Continental courtly and salon milieu had a similar effect: women had a natural desire to dress in a flashy manner, and they had transmitted this habit to the male courtiers – and the feminine qualities with it.<sup>465</sup>

‘The general Purpose of this Paper, is to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cunning, Vanity, and Affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse, and our Behaviour.’<sup>466</sup> The manifesto of *The Tatler* supports David Kuchta’s thesis according to which the eighteenth-century English elite made a distinction between Continental absolutism and the softening impact of luxury and hedonism. Like many scholars of politeness, Kuchta situates the break in the codes of dress in the late seventeenth century; he uses the term ‘noble

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<sup>462</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 90.

<sup>463</sup> Boswell, *Holland*, 45.

<sup>464</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 32.

<sup>465</sup> See E. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury*. London, 2004.

<sup>466</sup> *The Tatler* I, 8.

magnificence' to illustrate the situation before 1688, and after the Glorious Revolution, this was substituted by 'refined simplicity'.<sup>467</sup> During the 'old sartorial regime' ostentatious dress was essential to aristocratic men's social and gender identity, it was a highly important component of the cultural definition of the aristocracy in Tudor-Stuart England.<sup>468</sup>

The Glorious Revolution was the turning point in the attitudes towards the outward appearance. Noble simplicity was now a mark of true aristocrat and patriot; both Whigs and many Tories saw the revolution not only as political phenomenon but also as the revolution of manners, and an highly important part of it was a new interpretation of the meaning of the outer appearance of the ruling class. Austere masculinity was associated to the patriotic spirit and English liberties, and as it easy to guess, the warning example was to be found on the other side of the Channel: France was the inexhaustible well of tyranny and flattery, effeminacy and frivolity, luxury and foppery.<sup>469</sup> The sharp demand for refined simplicity and the critique of foppery *ad nauseam* roused a counter reaction: Mandeville, Chesterfield and the Macaronis defended the positive impact of luxury and the brilliance of the outer appearance, and in the case of the latter, extravagance received carnivalesque features.<sup>470</sup>

According to Philip Carter, Boswell, in spite of some juvenile marks of snobbery, adopted as a mature person the Johnsonian viewpoint that the attraction of a man laid in the powers of his conversation and intelligence rather than the magnificent public show.<sup>471</sup> I would argue that Boswell's sartorial philosophy was closer to 'noble magnificence', sometimes manifest extravagance than 'refined simplicity'. 'Sometimes I considered that a fine lodging denoted a man of great fashion, but then I thought that few people would see it and therefore the expense would be hid, whereas *my business was to make as much show as I could* with my small allowance,' the young Boswell wrote soon after moved to London in 1762. He continued that an 'elegant place to come home to was very agreeable and would inspire me with ideas of my own dignity; but then I thought it would be hard if I had not a proportionable show in other things, and that it was better to come gradually to a fine place than from a fine to a worse.'<sup>472</sup> Boswell used the concept of dignity in accordance to elegant milieu – usually the term referred to the inner characteristics and the universal human dignity common to all, not to the outward qualities.

*The Spectator* represented the golden mean between the representative courtly code and strongly moralistic attitudes towards ostentation. 'The Medium between a Fop and a Sloven is what a Man of Sense would endeavour to keep,' could be a good

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<sup>467</sup> David Kuchta, *The Three-piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550—1850*. Berkeley, CA, 2002, 4.

<sup>468</sup> Kuchta 2002, 24.

<sup>469</sup> Kuchta 2002, 100.

<sup>470</sup> Kuchta 2002, 124.

<sup>471</sup> Carter 2001, 198.

<sup>472</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 58 (it. MK).

crystallization of the moral weekly's attitude.<sup>473</sup> A real gentleman had to take care of his outer appearance for the sake of social credibility, but foppery was a mark of effeminate impulses, and interest in the outer appearance was commonly understood as a feminine feature: 'The usual Conversation of ordinary Women very much cherishes this Natural Weakness of being taken with Outside and Appearance. Talk of a new-married Couple, and you immediately hear whether they keep their Coach and six, or eat in Plate: Mention a Name of an absent Lady, and it is ten to one but you learn something of her Gown and Petticoat.'<sup>474</sup> The unceasing dabbling with vanities and aesthetic interest in the outer appearance of things and people had fashioned women's predilections and judgement so that 'when Women are thus perpetually dazzling one another's Imaginations, and filling their Heads with nothing but Colours, it is no Wonder that they are more attentive to the superficial Parts of Life, than the solid and substantial Blessings of it.'<sup>475</sup> The fashioning of the seductive appearance had a fundamental impact on a woman's consciousness: she had begun to observe her own person through the eyes of the others, and so a woman was whimsical and incapable of objective, stern and independent decisions. Instead 'Women, whose Hearts are fixed upon the Pleasure they have in the Consciousness that they are the Objects of Love and Admiration, are ever changing the Air of their Countenances, and altering the Attitude of their Bodies, to strike the Hearts of their Beholders with new Sense of their Beauty.'<sup>476</sup>

Foppery and affectation was a permanent target of satire in *The Spectator*. The foppish outlook was a symptom of the dominance of feminine impulses; a man was then more interested in the applause of injudicious audience than the authentic impact of his sense and conversational talent.<sup>477</sup> *The Tatler's* essay 113 includes an inventory of an executed beau. It goes without saying that vanity is one central theme in the satire. The list contains a tweezer-case – 'containing Twelve Instruments for the Use of each Hour in the Day' –, a quart of orange-flower-water, a dozen pair of red-heeled shoes, three pair of red silk stockings, etc. There are two other and maybe more interesting themes, namely effeminacy and francophilia. The list included both a sword with a steel diamond hilt – 'never drawn but once, at *May-Fair*' – and lessons for the flute (the author seemed to agree with Frederick the Great's father). There were also French scissors and a French grammar, and it is worth noting that the adjective "French" had been written in italics.<sup>478</sup>

In *The Spectator's* satirical essay on the dissection of the beau's head, the operation uncovers the lifestyle this effeminate creature. The findings were elucidatory:

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<sup>473</sup> *The Spectator* II, 91.

<sup>474</sup> *The Spectator* I, 67.

<sup>475</sup> *The Spectator* I, 67.

<sup>476</sup> *The Spectator* I, 160-1.

<sup>477</sup> *The Spectator* I, 161.

<sup>478</sup> *The Tatler*, Vol. II, 178—181.

*Glandula pinealis* – the seat of the soul – ‘smelt very strong of Essence and Orange-Flower Water’.<sup>479</sup> In the antrum there were found ribbons, lace, and embroidery as well as billet-doux, love letters, and pricked dances. The findings were not confined to material substances: ‘right side [of cavity] was filled with Fictions, Flatteries and Falsehoods, Vows, Promises and Protestations; that on the left with Oaths and Imprecations.’<sup>480</sup> This “medical” text illustrated how outer appearance and inner qualities were connected in the eighteenth-century mainstream thinking. Luxury invaded the soul and corrupted it with its immoral aestheticism. But that was not enough, it corrupted social virtues, conversation, and, after all, reason and healthy moral judgment which are the distinctive marks of the real gentleman. According to Philip Carter, the general ethos of *The Spectator* was ‘a clear sense of superiority of urban styles of comfortable, informal clothing which, by permitting unselfconscious and relaxed movement, served practically and metaphorically as a means to acquire a superior brand of easy and polite sociability.’<sup>481</sup> The critique of *The Spectator* was directed towards both the dull formalities of provincial country aristocracy and the theatrical splendour of Restoration courtly nobility.

The deeper dimension in the discussions on dress and outward appearance was the relationship between the inner and outer self, between the inner moral and intellectual qualities and the outer semblance. Joseph Addison wrote in *the Spectator* a highly illustrative essay on true and false happiness. True happiness felt at home in the Epicurean retirement, far from the madding crowd; it ‘is of a retired Nature, and an Enemy to Pomp and Noise’ and, most importantly, true happiness was strongly connected with a man’s relation with his inner self and his relation with his most intimate circle: ‘it arises, in the first place, from the Enjoyment of one’s self; and, in the next, from the Friendship and Conversation of a few select Companions.’ True happiness was turned to the authentic self which shunned to uncover itself: ‘It loves Shade and Solitude, and naturally haunts Groves and Fountains, Fields and Meadows: In short, it feels every thing it wants within it self, and receives no Addition from Multitudes of Witnesses and Spectators.’<sup>482</sup>

The relation to being in public was a highly distinctive issue. The polite public sphere, the “to see and to be seen”, the crucial element in the fashionable sociability, was, according to Addison, the source of inauthentic being because the people who pursue the applause of others were in danger to lose their inner self. The world of polite pleasures was the sphere of false happiness which ‘loves to be in a Crowd, and to draw the Eyes of the World upon her. She does not receive any Satisfaction from the Applauses which she gives her self, but from the Admiration which she raises in others. She flourishes in Courts and Palaces, Theatres and Assemblies, and has no Existence

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<sup>479</sup> *The Spectator* II, 571.

<sup>480</sup> *The Spectator* II, 571.

<sup>481</sup> Carter 2001, 62.

<sup>482</sup> *The Spectator* I, 67-8.

but when she is looked upon.’<sup>483</sup> Here Addison introduced two conceptions of the self and its relation to the others: the first referred to essential selfhood, to the constant and autonomous self; the other alluded to the multiplicity of selves, to the self as a changeable social mask. The ‘authentic’ self was self-determinative in its relations to the others; the multiple self was a chameleon which reflected its social environment. According to Addison, the constant self was an essential prerequisite to the sane moral judgment; the multiple self which changed whimsically its mask was a source of moral corruption.

Dr. Johnson emphasized modesty in the public show and, for him, intellectual and moral qualities were the real measures of the value of a person. Sometimes the loyal Boswell expressed diplomatically his dissenting opinion with his peculiar friend. ‘Dr. Johnson talked of some person who had attained to the state of the philosophical wise man, that is, to have no want of anything. “Then,” said I, “the savage is a wise man.” “Sir,” said he, “I do not mean simply being without, but not having a want,”’ he remarked in 1776, ‘I maintained it was better to have fine clothes, for instance, than not to want them.’ Here Boswell represented the *mondaine*-attitude: a civilized man had to dress up in a civilized manner, and rather overdress than dress slovenly, but the doctor was firm in his opinion: “No, Sir,” said he, “fine clothes are only good as they supply the want of other means of having respect. Was Charles the 12, think you, less respected in his coarse blue coat and black neckcloth? And you find the King of Prussia dresses plain because the dignity of his character is sufficient”<sup>484</sup> That was by no means Johnson’s only comment against foppery and for the modest outlook. In *The Rambler*, he was much stricter and he connected fine dress to the corruptive tendencies of the highly sophisticated urban civilization. Johnson saw explicitly foppery as symptom of the feminization of the fashionable life.

The moral story of a young fop is illustrative. The family background was a crucial factor in the formation of the character of a young man. The man who told his story had grown up as an only child of parents who ‘kept good company, rattled in chariots, glittered in play-houses, and danced at court’.<sup>485</sup> Feminization was closely associated with Continental, especially French influences; the plain and unspectacular English dress was not enough for the novice fop: ‘At fourteen I was completely skilled in all niceties of dress, and I could not only enumerate all the variety of silks, and distinguish the product of a French loom, but dart my eye through a numerous company, and observe every deviation from the reigning mode.’<sup>486</sup> The final destination of the writer was, of course, the fashionable society of London, and the beginning was quite promising: ‘Here I found myself universally caressed and applauded: the ladies praised

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<sup>483</sup> *The Spectator* I, 67-8.

<sup>484</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 300-1.

<sup>485</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 216.

<sup>486</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 218.

the fancy of my cloaths, the beauty of my form, and the softness of my voice.’<sup>487</sup> It is easy to guess that *sic transit gloria mundi*, and the writer had to notice that the favour of the ladies was highly transitory by nature.

Johnson was the arch-conservative classicist but it is easy to find the same emphasis in the works of William Shenstone, who was a “modern” man of sensibility. ‘In the first place, it is by no means clear,’ he wrote in an essay, ‘that dress and equipage are sure signs of pride. Where it is joined with a supercilious behaviour, it becomes then a corroborative testimony. ...Those who are incapable of shining but by dress, would do well to consider that the contrast betwixt them and their cloaths turns out much to their disadvantage.’<sup>488</sup> Shenstone did not condemn totally fine dress and equipage but the fine external figure had to reflect inner qualities: ‘the refinements of luxury ... are perhaps as often the gratifications of fancy, as the consequence of an ambition to surpass and eclipse our equals.’<sup>489</sup> But using the splendid dress was highly demanding: ‘A man should not wear a French dress, till he could give an account of the best French authors; and should be versed in all the oriental languages before he should presume to wear a diamond.’<sup>490</sup>

In another essay Shenstone formulated his views in short *maximes* whose central message could be expressed with the quotation ‘Men of quality never appear more amiable than when their dress is plain.’<sup>491</sup> Study and application in dress, as in writing, were the worst enemies of a successful result; if the wearer feels a consciousness that he is fine, he is never easy but the impression is foppishness and affectation.<sup>492</sup> The early Romantic conception of nature and naturalness can be found in the background of Shenstone’s viewpoint: simplicity, modesty, and, first of all, the correspondence between inner and outer nature; and in the realm of feelings this was especially clear: ‘Love can be founded upon nature only; or the appearance of it ... A rich dress adds but little to the beauty of person. It may possible create a deference, that is rather an enemy of love.’<sup>493</sup> As a man of feeling Shenstone was not a satirist and moralist but he saw splendour of dress and theatrical appearance foreign to the authentic feeling and intimate friendship in intimate circles. The cult of authenticity and sincerity included a suspicious attitude towards formal social distinctions and social snobbery.

Boswell had also a theory of the self, and it was puzzlingly similar with Addison’s inauthentic self who pursued false happiness: ‘A man’s dress is really a considerable part of him, both in his own idea and in that of others.’ When he thanked David Garrick for the new wig in a letter on September 10, 1772, he wrote how the wig had given him

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<sup>487</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 219.

<sup>488</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 29-30

<sup>489</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 29.

<sup>490</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 30-1.

<sup>491</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 87.

<sup>492</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 84, 85.

<sup>493</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 84-6.



‘indeed an air much superiour to what any other wig did.’<sup>494</sup> Boswell had these ideas in his mind when his father had just died. He reflected the situation from the perspective of the calculated public show. ‘I resolved to take the full year of mourning my father, according to the old fashion. I wore full mourning six months,’ he remarked in his journal in the spring 1783, and he made clear how complicated the situation was: ‘I now wore second mourning, which was shabby, so I ordered it new: a dark raven-grey frock, black cassimere vest and breeches for common wear, and silk for genteeler occasions. In the mean time I walked about in an old dark-grey frock, satin vest, and stocking-breeches.’<sup>495</sup> In the essay *On Luxury* (1778), he wrote a passage on dress and its impact on mind: ‘I have no doubt that dress has a great deal of influence upon the mind. Every one has felt himself more disposed to decorum and propriety and courtesy, and other good qualities, when genteelly dressed, than when slovenly apparel.’ Boswell argued that we had a natural disposition to fashion our self according to the requirements of the others; and it seems that when, in Addison’s conception of self, the good qualities in a sense radiated outwards from the morally strong inner self, for Boswell, on the contrary, the elegant appearance, which was fashioned for the public, would have had positive impacts on the inner self. ‘Perhaps there is a general propensity in our faculties to assimilate themselves to that circumstance about us,’ he argued in the essay, ‘which is most perceptible of whatever sort it is, as matter takes a form from whatever mould is applied to it.’ Boswell strengthened his argument by stating ‘that the most gallant men have been fond of elegance of dress. Caesar was at first censured for an excess of the *cura corporis*; and a very brave modern general, Lord Mark Kerr, is celebrated equally for his determined courage as well as his fine clothes.’<sup>496</sup> The splendid outlook stimulated and supported good inner qualities, and it is worth of noting that these inner qualities decorum, propriety and courtesy were quite “external” by nature. Apart from a mention of General Kerr’s courage, Boswell did not say a word about traditional Christian or republican virtues,

‘I am drest in green & gold. I have my chaise in which I sit alone like Mr Gray, and Thomas rides by me in a claret coloured suit with a silver laced hat’, Boswell wrote about a journey to a dinner party in a letter to Temple on November 5, 1767.<sup>497</sup> On several occasions Boswell found splendid appearance good as such; the elegant outlook was an adequate reason for a positive judgment. His fascination with fine clothes was obvious even as a young boy; a splendid outlook had an impact on his choice of friends: according to Frederick A. Pottle, the reason which attracted him to one of his closest friends John Johnston of Grange ‘in the first place was the elegance of Johnston’s clothes: he was wearing a coat with a straw-coloured lining.’<sup>498</sup> Boswell wrote to his

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<sup>494</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Garrick, Burke & Malone*, 43.

<sup>495</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 77-8.

<sup>496</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 59.

<sup>497</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Temple*, 211.

<sup>498</sup> Pottle 1966, 29.

respected master Lord Kames from Germany in enthusiastic mood: ‘I hope to be company for you in a better style. I am making a tour through the German courts. I am behaving as my best friends could wish.’ Boswell was extremely content with his own performance – ‘During this portion of my existence in which I am visiting the courts of Germany, I am acting with perfect propriety. I am fulfilling every duty that my station requires, and when the sun goes down, I review my day with satisfaction.’ – but the most important issue was the response of the others: ‘Wherever I come I find myself loved. My dear Lord! Is it possible for me not to be flattered when I find that in a day or two I can make strangers of all kinds regard me?’ Boswell was so convinced of the superiority of his exceptional person that he was sure that ‘this could not be done without external merit. As to my internal worth I am always certain.’ Finally he made a generalisation: ‘To talk philosophically, a man’s acquitting himself well or ill depends extremely on the situation in which he is placed. Take me at the present as I am.’<sup>499</sup>

Boswell saw himself also as an artistically fashioned object in the social spectacle. The young Boswell was supping with the literary cream of London, and his frame of mind was excellent. The confident disposition and the *sprezzatura* of the behaviour were strongly connected with the presence of the company: ‘I was well dressed and in excellent spirits...I sat with much secret pride, thinking of my having such a company with me. I behaved with ease and propriety.’<sup>500</sup> Boswell loved the rituals of courtly and fashionable publicity – more pompous the better – and he desired to be involved in the fashionable spectacles. ‘Then went and saw the King and Queen pass from the Opera,’ he wrote in the *London Journal*, ‘and then saw the Guards drawn up in the court of the Palace while the moon shone and showed their splendour. I was all gentle felicity...I had now got a genteel violet-coloured frock suit.’<sup>501</sup> In the spring 1789, Boswell’s wife was mortally ill in Scotland but the husband was incapable of leaving London. In a letter to Temple on March 31, 1789, having contemplated his wife’s condition, he wrote: ‘How different are she and I! I was the *great man* (as we used to say) at the late Drawing-room, in a suit of imperial blue lined with rose-coloured silk, and ornamented with rich gold-wrought buttons. What a motley scene is life!’<sup>502</sup>

Soon after his arrival to Utrecht in the autumn 1763, the young Boswell had begun to feel at home in local fashionable society. Count Nassau’s dinner parties were the highlight of the season. Boswell had taken pains with his appearance:

This is the great day of Count Nassau’s dinner. Dress in scarlet and gold, fine swiss, white silk stockings, handsome pumps, and have silver-and-silk sword-knot, Barcelona handkerchief, and elegant toothpick-case which you had in a present from a lady. Be quite the man of fashion and keep up your

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<sup>499</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 107.

<sup>500</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 292.

<sup>501</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 53.

<sup>502</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 239.

dignity. Don't think it idle time, for while abroad being in good company is your great scheme and is really improving.<sup>503</sup>

Again dignity was exclusive and closely tied to the aesthetic effect produced by outer appearance. Besides the foppish relation to the exteriors the quotation refers to Boswell's self-fashioning programme. The journal made him possible to observe his behaviour from the outside, like the connoisseur observes the work of art. The splendour of the surface was a central part of Boswell's relation to the outer world as well as of his self image.

### *Architectural Distinctions*

Architecture was a highly distinctive topic in eighteenth-century Britain. Baroque manifested the values of Continental absolutism and Catholicism, and its opulent and fantastic forms were seen unacceptable for the British common sense mentality. Republican ethos required a plain and reserved architecture. Colin Campbell wrote in *Vitruvius Britannicus*: 'How affected and licentious are the Works of Bernini and Fontana?' and he continued how 'wildly extravagant are the Designs of Boromini, who has endeavoured to debauch Mankind.'<sup>504</sup> Even native architects had not been given a mercy; Christopher Wren, Nicholas Hawksmoor and Sir John Vanbrugh had built London following principles of the moderate Baroque but their fantastic and emotional architecture aroused deep suspicions.<sup>505</sup> In the early eighteenth-century came a reaction: Britain needed a new language of architecture which should express freedom and civic spirit, architecture without over decorated decadence and pompous representativeness. Then the Palladianism, once imported to England by Inigo Jones, was found again. John Summerson writes on the new stylistic principles:

They were the standards of commonsense, as opposed to the imaginative unreason of Baroque. They were felt to be true Roman – that is, Vitruvian – standards, not merely Italian, and it was probably suspected that while there was a clear correspondence between English Protestantism, Lockean philosophy and this kind of building, the only correspondence suggested by the Baroque was with Jesuitry and the Whore of Babylon. Suspicions of this sort crystallised in the Palladian movement.<sup>506</sup>

Resistance towards Baroque aesthetic manifested itself after the Great Fire when ambitious general plans were offered for reconstructing the new London. They followed

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<sup>503</sup> Boswell, *Holland*, 45.

<sup>504</sup> Cooper 2002, 308.

<sup>505</sup> John Summerson, *Georgian London*. London, 1945, 78.

<sup>506</sup> Summerson 1945, 71.

geometrical and hierarchical principles familiar from Continental capital cities. All of them were dismissed. The rebuilding of London followed an irregular mosaic-like structure in which the square was the basic unit. Informal cosiness was preferred to representativeness.<sup>507</sup>

Like fantastic Baroque, the Augustan humanists shunned the whimsical and emotional Gothic. Occasionally Addison criticized certain authors he comparing their poetry with Gothic architecture, and the comparison was not flattering: ‘I look upon these Writers as *Goths* in Poetry, who, like those in Architecture, not being able to come up to the beautiful Simplicity of the old *Greeks* and *Romans*, have endeavoured to supply its Place with all the Extravagancies of an irregular Fancy.’<sup>508</sup> Beautiful simplicity, austere forms and rational order were the noble characteristics of the Palladian architecture; the Gothicism was distinguished with the terms ‘monstrous’ and ‘barbarous’.<sup>509</sup> ‘The Greatness of the Manner in the one, and the Meanness in the other’,<sup>510</sup> wrote Addison when he compared the Pantheon at Rome with an interior of a Gothic cathedral.

In the second half of the century, the awakening romantic sensibility found the unique beauty of the long despised Gothicism; the Gothic revival was connected with the High Church and Neo Catholic religiosity, the sentimental longing for the feudal past, and a reaction towards over-intellectual and unemotional classicism. The Gothic revival which in Britain could be dated back even to Thoms Gray’s poem *Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard* (1751) but rose as the dominant architectural style not until the 1830s and 1840s, belonged to the antirational, anticlassical and anti-Enlightenment undercurrents of the eighteenth-century. While Palladianism was the architecture of Whig aristocracy, the later Neo-classicism was connected with republicanism, liberalism and the revolutionary tendencies, the Gothic revival was associated with monarchism, conservatism and the High Church ideology.<sup>511</sup> It was very symptomatic that Boswell’s architectural taste was both early modern and romantic: he was strongly fascinated by the Continental Baroque, its magnificent splendour and its courtly and Catholic associations. On the other hand, when Addison had found Gothic style muddled and barbarous, the ancient monasteries and cathedrals raised powerful emotions in Boswell.

The architectural discussions had conspicuous similarities with the debates about the politeness and its moral and political dimensions; the physical milieu reflected the social values of the society, and so the question was, should the truly polite people live in the opulent splendour like the highest nobility in London, Paris and Rome, or in the

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<sup>507</sup> Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*. New York and Oxford, 1995, 538—543.

<sup>508</sup> *The Spectator* I, 268.

<sup>509</sup> *The Spectator* I, 271.

<sup>510</sup> *The Spectator* III, 556.

<sup>511</sup> Kostof 1995, 571—2; Lee Morrissey, *From the Temple to the Castle: An Architectural History of British Literature, 1660—1760*. Charlottesville and London, 1999, 94—105; David Watkin, *English Architecture*. Singapore, 2001., 129, 154—161.

modest and natural milieu like Fielding's Mr. Allworthy. John Harris in his pamphlet *An Essay on Politeness* (1775) was inclined towards the latter stance: 'The nobles in the time of Sincerity preferred magnificence of appeal, the splendour of villas, and multitude of domestics, to magnanimity of soul, the parent of every virtue, instead of a serene placid look, the attendant on a good mind, they put on the mirth of a bacchanal.'<sup>512</sup>

Sincerity was an allegorical figure in which personified the pamphleteer's ideas of true politeness. According to him, the lifestyle of the polite class did not fill the demands of morally authentic politeness, and the splendid milieu was a symptom of corruption. But Sincerity who lived how the authentically polite man should live 'was content with a decent mansion; neatness and elegance vied with each other in the disposition of his furniture, and the regularity and the decorum in which they were preserved.' The classical elements of the noble milieu such as Corinthian pillars, triumphal arches, golden doors and marble fountains were absent, and instead Sincerity lived in 'well-proportioned rooms' in the paradise-like milieu where 'the cooling grotts, the refreshing breezes, and the soft murmurs of a distant cascade, feasted all the powers of imagination, touched every string of noble sensation, detained the eye with continued admiration, and lulled all care to rest.'<sup>513</sup> Simplicity and close relation to the nature were principal features in this morally sound way of life. The attitude towards continental impacts was strongly suspicious: 'Instead of covering their tables in the plain and healthful manner in which they formerly were, with the fruits of Ceres, the libations of Bacchus, the gifts of Flora and Pomona, they now spread them with the poisons of a foreign name, the insipids of another clime, and the unpalatable fruits of an enemy's vineyard.'<sup>514</sup> It does not require a great talent of interpretation to calculate to which country the writer was referring. After the story of Sincerity, the writer characterizes the features of sincere politeness and he takes great pains to prove that politeness and Christian religion were possible to reconcile.

The tone was different in John Gwynn's famous pamphlet *London and Westminster Improved* (1766). According to Gwynn, the aesthetical qualities of the city space, the beauty and elegance of public spaces and buildings, were strongly connected with the level of public spirit; public elegance and grandeur advanced common good and the splendour of the capital was a great advantage to the nation. Gwynn shared the view that luxury had a positive impact on the civilization. The claim that the decline of great civilizations was caused by luxury was, according to him, a total misinterpretation: 'Publick magnificence may be considered as a political and moral advantage to every nation...it [i.e. luxury] tends...to excite emulation in the polite and liberal arts.'<sup>515</sup> Gwynn presented schematically the progress of the civilization. When

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<sup>512</sup> John Harris, *An Essay on Politeness*. London, 1775, 10.

<sup>513</sup> Harris, *Essay*, 7-10.

<sup>514</sup> Harris, *Essay*, 8.

<sup>515</sup> John Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved*. London, 1766 (1969), xiii-xiv.

the civilization had developed to phase where agriculture produces surplus, trade became possible, and then ‘the demands for exportation stimulate the manufacturer, wealth arises, and artificial wants increase; the rich inhabitants look out for the means of ease, pleasure and distinction, these produce the polite arts, and the original formation of huts is now converted into architecture.’ He also stressed the importance of taste and discernment which made the ‘necessary distinctions between the palace and the cottage.’<sup>516</sup> The desire of excellence was a fundamental human need, and there was not any moral problem with satisfying it because when ‘a villa rises, an estate is improved, and a manufacture established’ there was created ‘the proper distinction between the Prince and the peasant, the merchant and the workman; these characterize the genius of the nation, mark the aera of its excellence, raise it from obscurity to fame, and fix it as the standard of taste to latest posteriority.’<sup>517</sup>

Interestingly Gwynn connected the representative Baroque splendour and requirements of the commercial society; usually the commercial class and the commercial Whig aristocracy had preferred more modest Palladianism. His ideal city was strictly ordered and had a geometrical structure: ‘It is to be wished, that the ground-plans of all great cities and towns were composed of right lines, and that the streets intersected each other at right angles...indeed, if it was practicable, a square or circular form should be preferred in all capital cities as best adapted to grandeur and convenience.’ Gwynn’s strongly royalist ethos was explicated when he proposed that in the center of a spacious opening ‘the King’s palace should be situated.’<sup>518</sup> He praised Louis XIV, the *bête noire* of the British patriots, who had encouraged all kinds of arts in his kingdom. The king’s ‘patronage of the arts, at the head of which he placed the celebrated Le Brun, was the utmost importance of the French nation. It was next to an impossibility that the royal countenance, seconded by the abilities of so great a master, should fail in bringing the polite arts into esteem and reputation.’<sup>519</sup>

The tone was similar in Lord Chesterfield’s letter from Paris which was ‘a most magnificent town, not near so big as London, but much finer; the houses being much larger, and all built of stone. It was not only much enlarged, but embellished, by the magnificence of the last King, Louis XIV.’ The respected monarch was not guilty of megalomania or reckless spending but ‘a prodigious number of expensive buildings, and useful and charitable foundations, such as libraries, hospitals, schools, etc., will long remain the monuments of the magnificence, humanity, and good government of that prince.’ The architectural splendour was the manifestation of the high level of civilization; the public magnificence was not an expression of the decadence of manners, but on the contrary, the French people ‘are well-bred, just I would have you be; they are not awkwardly bashful and ashamed, like the English; but easily civil,

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<sup>516</sup> Gwynn, *London*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>517</sup> Gwynn *London*, xiv.

<sup>518</sup> Gwynn, *London*, 6.

<sup>519</sup> Gwynn, *London*, 59-60.

without ceremony. Though they are very gay and lively, they have attention to everything, and always mind what they are about.<sup>520</sup>

According to Gwynn, the commercial nature of London demanded grandeur and representative city space, and he used frequently the term a “great commercial city” to characterize London. The continuity of commercial success required public splendour: ‘it must be allowed that publick works of real magnificence, taste, elegance and utility, in a commercial city, are of the utmost consequence; they are not only of real use in point of splendor and convenience, but as necessary to the community as health and cloathing to the human body.’<sup>521</sup> Gwynn saw the opaque and labyrinthine character of London as an extremely barbarian feature: ‘how would the good people of London be struck, if a traveller, in describing a Hottentot crawl or city, should tell them, that this immense crawl, equally populous and rich, is nothing more than a confused heap, an irregular, slovenly, ill-digested composition, of all that is absurd and ungraceful; that its principal avenues are narrow and crooked, that the greatest part of the crawl is composed of blind alleys and narrow unconnected passages’.<sup>522</sup>

Boswell’s remarks about architecture followed same routes as Gwynn’s but the relation to the anonymous crowd and the multiplicity was the distinctive feature: Boswell embraced the chaotic nature of the metropolis with the same emotional intensity as the representative splendour of London and the German residential cities. He was struck by architectural magnificence of the German princely courts as he had been affected by the splendour of their social milieu. In Potsdam, Frederick’s summer resort was ‘light and elegant. But the gallery is truly superb. It is very long, very lofty, and very richly finished.’<sup>523</sup> Boswell was particularly fascinated by the imaginative and decorative character of the Baroque architecture, and Dresden, the Baroque city *par excellence*, made an exceptionally strong impression on the young Boswell from the first moments. ‘I got in good time to the beautiful city of Dresden,’ he noted in his journal, ‘put up at the Hotel de Pologne, an excellent house, dressed in scarlet and gold.’<sup>524</sup> The close friend John Johnston received a letter dated October 12, 1764, in which he read that ‘the Capital of Saxony now contains your friend. I wish with all my heart that I had you here.’ Boswell fascinated the aesthetical splendour of the residential city of Saxony: ‘Dresden is the most beautiful City that I ever saw. The houses are generally built of free Stone so that the streets have a most elegant look. The Catholic Church and some other public edifices are very fine; very splendid I should say. There is a fine river here, over which is built a magnificent bridge.’<sup>525</sup> Boswell kept a diary at the same time, and the tone of the remarks was similar: ‘I admired the new Catholic

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<sup>520</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* II, 471.

<sup>521</sup> Gwynn, *London*, 20-1.

<sup>522</sup> Gwynn, *London*, 7.

<sup>523</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 18.

<sup>524</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 128.

<sup>525</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Grange*, 137.



church, which is an elegant building, finely adorned with excellent statues.<sup>526</sup> In the young Scotsman's eyes, the courtly splendour was not overshadowed by the ecclesiastical: The Zwinger was 'a superb building' where he saw 'some fine antiques in bronze.'<sup>527</sup>

In Berlin and Mannheim, Boswell admired the splendid uniformity of the architecture. 'I was struck with the beauty of Berlin,' he remarked in his journal in Potsdam, 'the houses are handsome and the streets wide, long, and straight. The Palace is grand. The palaces of some of the royal family are very genteel. The Opera-House is an elegant building, with this inscription: "Fridericus Rex Apollini et Musis."<sup>528</sup> Later he continued that Berlin 'is the finest city I have ever seen. ... The streets are spacious and the houses well built.'<sup>529</sup> Mannheim made the same impression: 'Why do I not talk of the beauty of Mannheim? of its streets *tirés à cordon* and lighted better than any streets I have seen?'<sup>530</sup>

The London pleasure garden was a commercial version of a representative urban milieu. It was a hybrid form of public space: the fantastic architectural structures and the extravagant forms of splendour had comparability with the Baroque, but economically and socially the pleasure garden was a remarkably modern phenomenon; it was a completely commercial institution and the only exclusive features were the price of the ticket and some requirements concerning clothing. The pleasure garden was a kind of fantasyland where people could create transitory identities in the spectacular milieu.<sup>531</sup> Boswell frequented pleasure gardens and he found Ranelagh exceptionally fascinating. It 'is of a more beautiful form [than the Pantheon]; more of it, or rather indeed the whole Rotunda, appears at once. It is better lighted. However,' he noted in his diary in 1772, 'we saw the Pantheon in time of mourning, when there was a dull uniformity, whereas we saw Ranelagh when the view was charmed with a gay profusion and variety of colours of the different dresses.'<sup>532</sup> The spa resort of Bath was a summery playground of the English fashionable society; it had exceptionally uniform architectural panorama and its social scene was fabulous. On April 28, 1776, Boswell wrote to Temple from Bath which was the 'most elegant city, which far exceeds my expectations. I will not attempt a description of it; I have no pencil for visible objects; I can only paint the varieties of mind, of *l'esprit*. ... It is the finest place on earth for you, for you may enjoy its society and its walks without effort or fatigue.'<sup>533</sup>

The splendour of the Baroque was one aspect of Boswell's architectural experience, and the whimsical and imaginative Gothic was the other. He was enchanted

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<sup>526</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 129.

<sup>527</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 131.

<sup>528</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 19.

<sup>529</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 23.

<sup>530</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 163-4.

<sup>531</sup> Ogborn 1998, 118-9, 127.

<sup>532</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 89.

<sup>533</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 187.

by the ancient English and Scottish sacral monuments, and some of his remarks had the spirit of the graveyard poetry. The Cathedral of York was ‘a prodigiously noble Gothic edifice,’<sup>534</sup> and the Exeter Cathedral ‘truly grand’<sup>535</sup>; in Lincoln, he was ‘struck with the cathedral.’<sup>536</sup> Medieval architecture raised always in Boswell strongly emotional and romantic disposition, as in the Temple Church where he found ‘the idea of the Knights Templars lying in the church was solemn and pleasing,’<sup>537</sup> and in Donaghadee’s Grey Abbey, where is one of the ‘finest Gothic ruins I ever saw...in particular there is an end window with three divisions in it, exceedingly Gothic, and covered with a thicker ivy than I ever saw.’<sup>538</sup> Boswell was similarly fascinated by the masterworks of the Continental Gothic. ‘The pulpit is of stone curiously carved’, he characterized in his journal the Bâle Cathedral, which was ‘one of the venerable Gothic buildings.’<sup>539</sup> In Strasbourg, he ‘went and saw the Cathedral, which is one of the noblest pieces of Gothic architecture that I ever beheld.’<sup>540</sup>

Emotional intensity was always present in his architectural reflections, and that was particularly strong in Westminster Abbey where the ‘solemnity of the grand old building, the painted glass windows, the noble music, the excellent service of the Church and a very good sermon, all contributed to do me much good.’<sup>541</sup> Obviously Boswell had moved to the post-Enlightenment and post-Augustan era; an immediate emotional identification dominated the spatial experience instead of critical observation. ‘Wherever I can find a good opportunity for superstition or enthusiasm, I always indulge it,’ he contemplated in his journal in 1772, ‘the warmth of my soul delights to expand itself. I should have been born in old times; or rather the expression should be “in early times”. Or I should have been born in Spain.’<sup>542</sup>

Boswell’s attitudes towards architecture had two dimensions. On the one hand, he was strongly impressed by the Baroque and the architectural manifestations of the representative publicness, and this feature reflected his strong affection for the courtly and aristocratic milieu. On the other hand, his romantic mind expressed itself in his fascination with the Gothic. On the general level, his architectural experience was characterized by imaginative aestheticism and emotional, sometimes ecstatic identification.

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<sup>534</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 146.

<sup>535</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 156.

<sup>536</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 352.

<sup>537</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 289.

<sup>538</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 212.

<sup>539</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 203.

<sup>540</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 185.

<sup>541</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 114.

<sup>542</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 114.

## *Sacral Beauty*

In this part, I will examine Boswell's reception of sacral space and his highly aesthetic way to reflect the religious experience. Sacral space is the oldest layer of the city space; the cities of the oldest civilizations were "cosmic cities" whose spatial order reflected the divine order. Instead of being a static entity, the sacral space has been the battlefield of competing interpretations. In the Christian West, the Reformation took in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a strongly anti-theatrical and iconoclastic direction, and this ethos was strengthened by the highly spectacular forms of Counter Reformation visual propaganda. Puritanism and Presbyterianism represented the extreme position in this issue. The condemnation was not limited to the magnificent sacral architecture but the formalism of the ceremonies, traditional festivals, all the artistic forms religious life were similarly blamed.

In his diary in 1768, Boswell compared his self with a lodging-house. He identified several figures which in different phases of his life had populated it, and among them there had been some religious ones, too, and sometimes they had had quite disturbing impact on the house-owner: 'When I first took up house, Presbyterian ministers used to make me melancholy with dreary tones. Methodists next shook my passions.'<sup>543</sup> One of the Methodists who had shocked Boswell's passions was the celebrated evangelist George Whitefield who was famous for his sermons against polite pleasures and the corruption of the Church of England.<sup>544</sup> He continued his self-examination and noted that Roman Catholic clergymen had been more welcome guests because they had filled the author's "house" with 'solemn ideas'.<sup>545</sup> And although the Catholic 'statues and many movable ornaments are gone, yet they drew some pictures upon my walls with such deep strokes that they still remain. They are, indeed, only agreeable ones'.<sup>546</sup> The 'solemn ideas' had led the young Boswell to a foolhardy action: he had converted to Catholicism for a short time in 1762. If the conversion had remained permanent, the consequences would have been fatal. He would have lost Auchinleck, he would not have been permitted to practice law and, the worst, Boswell would have been excluded from the best societies of London and Edinburgh.<sup>547</sup> Very soon he realized that the Church of England could satisfy more safely his longing of aesthetic beauty and a ceremonial drama.<sup>548</sup> The physical beauty and its concrete manifestations in sacral architecture was the essence of the Boswell's experience of sacral space.

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<sup>543</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 148.

<sup>544</sup> Pottle 1966, 33.

<sup>545</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 148.

<sup>546</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 148.

<sup>547</sup> Martin 1999, 66.

<sup>548</sup> Martin 1999, 80-1.

Boswell was given a stern Calvinist breeding by his mother, and this heritage was an inexhaustible well of melancholy and despair. ‘My mother,’ Boswell wrote in an autobiographical sketch, ‘was extremely pious. She inspired me with devotion. But unfortunately she taught me Calvinism. My catechism contained the gloomiest doctrines of that system. The eternity of punishment was the first idea I ever formed. How it made me shudder!’<sup>549</sup> The idea of predestination raised metaphysical horror in Boswell; the ideas of contingency and the freedom of human action were such crucial elements for him that he could not accept the idea of necessity in the philosophical level either. This crucial problem was a highly important topic particularly in his discussions on religion in his German grand tour.<sup>550</sup>

Several years later, in the winter 1781, Boswell had read Lord Monboddo’s and Lord James’s deterministic philosophy with grim consequences: ‘I was shocked by such a notion and sunk into dreadful melancholy, so that I went out to the wood and groaned.’<sup>551</sup> When in Holland in 1764, he wrote a remark on the methods with which his mother had taught him religion. She had compelled him to hammer the main dogmata of the Presbyterian Confession into his head without understanding them at all: ‘Election and Reprobation and Irresistible Grace were to me as unknown as the systems of the votaries of Vishnu, Ishvara, and Brahma in the East Indies.’<sup>552</sup> This referred to the gloominess of the milieu of the author’s childhood but the note also emphasized how far his upbringing had been from the ideals of innovative “polite learning”. Not only the permanent fear of eternal damnation but especially the lack of aesthetic dimension, sense of form and beauty, made Presbyterianism detestable. In summer 1780, Boswell felt aversion also in the Glassite meeting-house in Edinburgh. According to him, it was appalling that the doctrine of predestination annihilated the crucial connection between religion and morality, and so took ‘away from us the hopes and fears of a future state,’ where we are to be judged according to our conduct in this life.<sup>553</sup> Boswell’s interpretation of the religious conduct was closely connected with his general scheme of self-cultivation; according to him, the earthly pilgrimage suitable for an exceptional ‘man of imagination and feeling’ was a part of aesthetics of polite existence and so strongly contradictory to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and election.

On a Sunday in 1763, Boswell had been ‘in an excellent calm and serious mood’<sup>554</sup>, but the attendance at a Presbyterian meeting threw his disposition out of balance: ‘I thought this would have done me good. But I found the reverse. Blair’s [the

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<sup>549</sup> James Boswell, ‘Sketch of the Early Life of James Boswell, Written by Himself for Jean Jacques Rousseau, 5 December 1764’, in Pottle 1966, 2.

<sup>550</sup> Marlies K. Danziger, ‘Boswell’s Travels through the German, Swiss, and French Enlightenment’, in *Boswell – Citizen of the World, Man of Letters* (ed. Irma S. Lustig). Lexington, KY, 1995, 17-20.

<sup>551</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 283.

<sup>552</sup> Boswell, *Holland*, 125.

<sup>553</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 215-6.

<sup>554</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 259.

preacher] New Kirk delivery and the Dissenters roaring out the Psalms sitting on their backsides, together with the extempore prayers, and in short the whole vulgar idea of the Presbyterian worship, made me very gloomy.<sup>555</sup> The ugliness and the lack of forms were in the core of this repugnance. The ceremony of the Anglican worship was a remedy to this: 'I therefore hastened from this place to St. Paul's, where I heard the conclusion of service, and had my mind set right again.'<sup>556</sup> Boswell once mentioned that forms and ceremonies were highly important for him, and this seemed to be particularly clear in religious issues.<sup>557</sup> Ceremony and aesthetic beauty were the consoling elements; the devout spirit did not well up from the thriving but a spatial experience which was strongly aesthetical by nature. The Good Friday of 1763 had inspired some religious contemplations, and Boswell noticed that 'annual return of such holy seasons is of great use' because it improved men's affections and kept in mind of religion.<sup>558</sup> He concluded that in this sense 'the Churches of Rome and England in this particular have a great advantage over the Presbyterians. Regularity and ceremony are of much advantage.'<sup>559</sup>

Boswell was not in any case hesitant or even critical towards religion as such but he had made strict distinction between different forms of religiosity, following highly aesthetic principles. The pursuit of beauty, happiness and aesthetic pleasure was a central component in his interpretation of the right form of religion. 'By religion, I understand a belief in a great and good power, the supreme fountain of intelligence and felicity, joined with an habitual devotion or pious endeavours to direct all the powers of the soul towards that divine object,' Boswell wrote in his essay *On Religion* (1782), and emphasizing the benevolent nature of our Creator continued that 'as much as may be, to approach a similitude with what we conceive of the amiable nature of God.'<sup>560</sup> According to Boswell, it was a fatal fallacy to suppose that the fear of eternal suffering and the gloomy conscience of the depravity of the mankind would have been the core of religion; on the contrary, religion should have to be recognized as 'a privilege, a comfort, an enjoyment'.<sup>561</sup> He wrote promisingly that 'the religious man may partake this world's goods as easily and agreeably as other men.'<sup>562</sup>

Religious life was a part of the aesthetics of existence; imagination and pleasure were the crucial terms in this context, too. Boswell's conception of religious experience is highly aesthetic and exclusive; the notions of sin, guilty, and grace did not exist very conspicuously in his texts. The central elements were aesthetic contemplation and a pleasure produced by noble milieus and sublime atmosphere. Boswell considered

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<sup>555</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 259.

<sup>556</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 259.

<sup>557</sup> Martin 1999, 103.

<sup>558</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 231.

<sup>559</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 231.

<sup>560</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 274.

<sup>561</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 274.

<sup>562</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 275.

religion similar to poetry, music and the other artistic activities: 'It is vain for those who have felt nothing of piety to assert, that there can be no reality in it. *Vital Religion*, as it is well expressed, is as undoubtedly an object of perception and taste, and delight, to numbers of the human race as poetry, or painting, or musick.'<sup>563</sup> Religion as 'an object of perception and taste' transformed religious feeling into sensual experience, and this experience was the ultimate proof of the truth of the religion. So it was 'unreasonable to disbelieve the experiences of piety, as the experiences of any of the three sister of arts as they are called, merely because we ourselves have not had any experience. We know well that there are some who have very little pleasure, and many who have pleasure at all, from one or other, or perhaps from any of these arts. But are they entitled to deny that others have?' The exclusive ethos is striking in the context of Augustinian Protestantism: people were, according to Boswell, neither equal nor powerless in front of Divinity; on the contrary, by cultivating their religious sensibility people sensible enough were competent to enjoy the joys of religion. He wrote in the essay on religion:

Men may indeed, if they are unbelievers, maintain fairly enough, that the joy of Religion is only a *pleasure of the imagination*, and the effect of enthusiasm. Be it so in this state of the argument. And is not the pious man superior to those who are not pious, at least as much as those who have a taste in poetry, painting, or musick are superior to those who have none? If "the poet's eye in a fine frenzy, rolling and glancing from Heaven to earth, from earth to Heaven," raises him above those whose conceptions are dull, and who see only what is immediately before them, is not he still higher in the intellectual scale, whose mind is occupied with the sublime ideas of divinity?<sup>564</sup>

Boswell applied to religious experience his general conception of a man of imagination, a 'person of imagination and feeling,'<sup>565</sup> a man who had more developed sensibility and the sense of aesthetic value than the normal people had. The sublime religious experience is only for those who are intelligent and sensitive enough to 'cultivate the *religious taste*, as the taste of any of the fine arts if we would have the exquisite pleasure which it yields to the heavenly minded,'<sup>566</sup> he concluded in the essay. The use of the concept of taste in this context is highly illustrating because, according to the Augustinian tradition, all men were equally incapable to acquire salvation on their own but the concept taste referred radically different direction: the religious practice was a kind of self-cultivation; like other polite pleasures, it was open only for the people who were sensitive enough to enjoy the finest nuances of the religious experience, and 'vital religion' was a highly exclusive sphere of free practice of the finest nuances of the

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<sup>563</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 277.

<sup>564</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 277-8.

<sup>565</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 68.

<sup>566</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 280.

religious taste. When Boswell's wife Margaret was seriously ill in the summer 1782, he considered painfully in his journal how different their disposition was, and the difference was manifest in the relation to the religion, too: 'But what hurts me more, she has nothing of that warmth of imagination which produces the pleasures of vanity and many others, and which is even a considerable cause of religious fervour.'<sup>567</sup>

Boswell's repulsion for the vulgar forms of religiousness became evident in his notes on the visit to a certain Dr. Boswell who was a member of the Presbyterian sect called Glassites. 'I found that the honest Doctor had not the refined notions of friendship which I have' the young Boswell wrote down with juvenile hauteur and recognized that the Doctor's lack of refinement did not limit to friendship: 'He talked, too, something about Jesus Christ's being his friend. I was quite provoked at this. "My dear Doctor," said I, "you would bring your religion into everything. I believe you will make it mend your breeches and sole your shoes by and by"'.<sup>568</sup> Vital religion was a part of the cultivated life of the cultured elite whose standards of taste and refinement were high above the average.

Boswell's remark about a Christmas sermon in St. Paul's crystallised his aesthetic attitude towards religious life. It was Christmas day 'which has always inspired me with most agreeable feelings. I went to St. Paul's Church and in that magnificent temple fervently adored the God of goodness and mercy.'<sup>569</sup> The notions of God's goodness and benevolence were here merged with the idea of religious experience as a source of aesthetic pleasure. Boswell continued that he heard 'a sermon by the Bishop of Oxford on the publishing of glad tidings of great joy.'<sup>570</sup> The young Boswell of the *London Journal* planned to go through all the churches and chapels in London, and the remarks on this odyssey were highly illuminating.<sup>571</sup> Boswell's sunny interpretation of religion was supported by a sermon at St. Martin's Church. The text was "My yoke is easy". According to the preacher, a certain Mr. Sumner, the religion 'might in some respects be called a yoke, as it laid some restraint upon the inclinations and passions of men, yet to a mind properly trained it was easy, nay delightful.'<sup>572</sup> The ending of the remark emphasized the significance of aesthetic beauty in the preaching when Boswell stated that 'the happiness and genuine piety he [Mr. Sumner] displayed in elegant language enforced by just and animated action'.<sup>573</sup> Here the sermon and the service were represented as an aesthetic and theatrical experience. In the context of the sacral space, beauty, elegance, representativeness, variety, ceremony, and formality were the central terms. The religious experience in its spatial dimension did not form an isolated sphere in the urban experience but sacral spaces and the emotions raised by them were

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<sup>567</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 454.

<sup>568</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 310.

<sup>569</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 104.

<sup>570</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 104.

<sup>571</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 106-7.

<sup>572</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 130.

<sup>573</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 130.



the part of aesthetical reception of the city. The religious experience had a spectacular character; the experience of the sacral space was a product of same function of active imagination which was a central element in the experience of the objects of art.

‘This being Good Friday, I endeavoured to excite in my mind a devout and solemn frame. In my opinion the annual return of such holy seasons is of great use,’ Boswell wrote about the ceremonial aspects of the religious life in the *London Journal*, ‘Men are thus kept in mind of religion, and their affections are improved. The Churches of Rome and England in this particular have a great advantage over the Presbyterians. Regularity and ceremony are of much advantage.’<sup>574</sup> The young Boswell formulated the reasons for his Catholic sympathies in a letter to his friend from Avignon on December 27, 1765: ‘MY DEAR JOHNSTON: You know I am half a Catholic. I love the solemn and magnificent worship of the Church of Rome’, and he continued that in spite of some suspicions concerning the doctrine of the Catholic faith, he had a great respect for ‘the many learned and holy men that have lived and died in a firm persuasion of that faith’.<sup>575</sup> Aesthetic splendour and the formal beauty of the ceremonies were the features which fascinated the young man of letters in the Catholic Church, and this affection never disappeared: ‘Then St. Peter’s grand frame,’ he wrote down in Italy, ‘prayed fervent to the unchangeable Father of all to drive away melancholy and keep clouds of Presbyterian Sundays from rendering mind gloomy.’<sup>576</sup>

Boswell frequented the Roman chapels of the foreign embassies in London; Bavarian, Neapolitan and Portuguese chapels were his favourites. ‘I went to Audley Chapel, but was still so dissipated that I could not fix my attention,’ Boswell remarked in 1763, ‘I then stepped into a Romish [Portuguese] Chapel and was filled with most romantic ideas.’<sup>577</sup> Especially the Bavarian Chapel was a precious place throughout Boswell’s life and as an aged man he wrote down how a visit to the chapel revived his ‘first London ideas,’ when he looked back to his first visit to the chapel.<sup>578</sup> The atmosphere of the Catholic milieu inspired romantic and sublime sentiments. Boswell wrote down in Utrecht in 1764: ‘Yesterday you [i.e. Boswell] got up very dull. However, you dressed and went to the Jesuits’ church, where the solemn worship put venerable ideas in your mind, not without many strange recollections of past life and philosophical ideas at present.’<sup>579</sup> For the young Boswell, it was not problematic at all to go to the shrine of the hated society. In Mannheim on the grand tour, the Jesuits’ Church inspired a detailed description of the architectural qualities of the chapel which was ‘a very elegant piece. The outside is of white stone, with some fine carving and one or two good statues. The inside is very fine both in painting and gilding, though a little

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<sup>574</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 231.

<sup>575</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Grange*, 203.

<sup>576</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 70.

<sup>577</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 254.

<sup>578</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 60.

<sup>579</sup> Boswell, *Holland*, 174.

gaudy' and 'there are some elegant altar-pieces in marble.'<sup>580</sup> He noted in sympathetic tone the global missionary role of the order which seemed to 'triumph far and near.'<sup>581</sup>

The architectural splendour of the Catholic churches was indeed an integral part of his interest in this confession. In Dresden, one of the first impressions was the new Catholic church, which was 'an elegant building, finely adorned with excellent statues.'<sup>582</sup> It is obvious that the young Boswell's short stay in the Church of Rome was an escape from the narrow Presbyterian milieu. Later, the youthful fascination slackened and the Church of England began to feel the spiritual home. In the autumn 1769 Boswell had gone to the Bavarian Chapel to reanimate the spiritual memories. 'In that very place, I was so solemnly happy in thinking myself united to the grand and only true Church',<sup>583</sup> he wrote in his journal, but he could not feel the milieu as earlier: 'I could not have so much devotion there as in the Churches of England'.<sup>584</sup> For Boswell, ceremony and formalism were combined with emotional intensity; he was 'a man of feeling' in the sacral sphere, too. He had attended Easter service in St. Paul's where the sermon dealt with Resurrection. 'I was quite placid and happy,' he recorded in his diary, 'I had fine faith, and I received the Holy Sacrament with fervency in the grand Cathedral of London.'<sup>585</sup> Also in the Chapel Royal Boswell felt something he called 'fervency'. 'The music was admirable,' he remarked in 1775, 'and actually to see the KING at his devotions was a high object for my mind. I was quite a Royalist, and a High Church man – *in worship*, for I went no farther.'<sup>586</sup> He registered that the reading desk was 'covered with crimson velvet and gold lace to lean upon' and a certain Dr. Richard Hurd 'displayed the divine influence of our Saviour's discourses in a distinct, elegant, and persuasive manner.'<sup>587</sup> Ceremony, aestheticism and emotional fervour were merged in the remark; the content of the experience referred to the past, to the early modern "High Church and Royalist" ethos, but the form, the sensibility was identifiably pre-Romantic in its subtle aestheticism and emotional sensitivity. 'I am a being very much consisting of feelings. ... My existence is chiefly conducted by the powers of fancy and sensation', Boswell outlined the substance of the episode in the Chapel Royal.<sup>588</sup>

The popish ethos was still tangible in the grand tour to Italy in 1765—66. In Rome, Boswell attended the papal mass. 'Immense crowd; fine day. Superb high mass,' he noted in the journal, 'Pope knelt and prayed. Whole crowd on knees. Universal silence; perfect devotion. Was quite in frame; thought it *one* way of adoring the Father of the

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<sup>580</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 164.

<sup>581</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 164.

<sup>582</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 129.

<sup>583</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 313.

<sup>584</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 313.

<sup>585</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 301.

<sup>586</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 97.

<sup>587</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 97.

<sup>588</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 97-8.

universe, and was certain no hell for ever. Then up. Stood by pope's chair when he gave blessing. Grand. The whole place crowded with people.<sup>589</sup> The intensity of the description implies how emotionally loaded the occasion had been; the expressions "immense crowd" and "crowded with people" referred to the strongly collective character of the experience: the enormous crowd was not foreign or menacing element but it was an elevating constituent in the sublime experience. Boswell attended similar occasions during his visit, and the ceremonial formality made always a great impression. 'Chapel of Vatican. High mass; quite solemn,' he wrote in his journal, 'Then saw a ceremony washing feet of twelve priests of various nations. Did it with great decency...Mingled grandeur and modesty.'<sup>590</sup>

The sacral and the sensual were sometimes perplexingly mingled in Boswell's remarks. The young Boswell was attending a service in St. George's Church where he heard a good sermon, but there were some disturbing elements. 'I was upon honour much disposed to be a Christian,' he noted in his journal in 1762, 'Yet I was rather cold in my devotion. The Duchess of Grafton attracted my eyes rather too much.'<sup>591</sup> Intermixing of heterogeneous elements was a characteristic feature of Boswell's remarks, and so his observations on sacral spaces and occasions contained secular, sometimes even sensual elements. He had just arrived Rome when a procession took place. 'We saw the ceremony at the Minerva,' he remarked in his journal in Italy, 'where his Holiness was carried on a magnificent chair decorated with a figure of the Holy Ghost. He made the round of the church and gave his blessing to the whole congregation, who knelt before his Holiness.'<sup>592</sup> But the continuation of the description made clear that the respect to the ceremony and the highest representative of the Church was far from absolute: 'Then he [the Pope] took his place on a sort of throne, where, after he had performed certain sacred rites of which I understood nothing, people kissed his slipper.'<sup>593</sup> Immediately, the attention of the writer moved to more profane things when a procession of Roman girls – 'some to be married and others to be nuns'<sup>594</sup> – who had received dowries from a public foundation took place. Unfortunately only 'a few of them were pretty, and most of the pretty were nuns'.<sup>595</sup> Boswell had heard a sermon about how a young man could learn to order his ways, but then the sensual impulses got the upper hand. He was confirmed that his exceptional and fanciful mental structure was a reason for this many-faceted attitude. He wrote down in 1762:

What a curious, inconsistent thing is the mind of man! In the midst of divine service I was lying plans for having women, and yet I had the most sincere

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<sup>589</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 68-9.

<sup>590</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 68.

<sup>591</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 68.

<sup>592</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 63.

<sup>593</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 63.

<sup>594</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 63.

<sup>595</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 63.

feelings of religion. I imagine that my want of belief is the occasion of this, so that I can have all the feelings. I would try to make out a little consistency this way. I have a warm heart and a vivacious fancy. I am therefore given to love, and also to piety or gratitude to God, and the most brilliant and showy method of public worship.<sup>596</sup>

Sacral milieus had a therapeutic function, too. Boswell had suffered of melancholy and restlessness. 'I went into Audley Chapel, but was still so dissipated that I could not fix my attention,' he wrote down in 1763, 'so I came out after part of the service was over. I then stepped into a Romish Chapel [the chapel of the Portuguese ambassador] and was filled with most romantic ideas.'<sup>597</sup> The experience of architectural beauty and religious piety could be totally integrated: 'I went to St. Andrew's Church in Holborn, which is a very fine building. At one end of it is a window of very elegant painted glass. I was in an excellent frame and heard service with true devotion.'<sup>598</sup> Sometimes a literary allusion connected with aesthetic and religious contemplation. 'At three o'clock I went to Westminster Abbey,' he wrote down in 1763, 'and the verger politely showed me into one of the prebend's stalls, where I sat in great state with a purple silk cushion before me. I heard a service with much devotion in this magnificent and venerable temple. I recalled the ideas of it which I had from *The Spectator*.'<sup>599</sup> Imagination connected the different spheres of reality. Imagination, aesthetic pleasure, extremely delicate sensibility, and the pursuit of emotional sensations were the main components of Boswell's sacral experience. Obviously he had a strong religious life, but it was basically aesthetic by nature, and his religiosity had an exclusive element: the finest nuances of religious life were only for the people of exceptional sensibility and taste.

### *Sublime Horror*

'I felt a strange inclination to go and see the execution as usual,' Boswell wrote down in 1780.<sup>600</sup> According to his essay *On Executions* (1783), 'simple death' could be 'fully sufficient to answer the purposes of publick punishment,' but in the same essay, he had written about the modern Roman form of execution called "macellare" about which he offered a detailed account with an apparent pleasure: 'The criminal is placed upon a scaffold, and the executioner knocks him on the head with a great iron hammer, then cuts his throat with a large knife, and lastly, hews him in pieces with an ax.'<sup>601</sup> The public executions which Boswell attended with the horrified enthusiasm were a kind of

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<sup>596</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 53-4.

<sup>597</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 254.

<sup>598</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 265.

<sup>599</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 270.

<sup>600</sup> Boswell, *Laird*, 211; see also Boswell, *Great Biographer*, 47 and 51.

<sup>601</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 347.

counter reality to the joy and solemnity aroused by the sacral architecture and ecclesiastical ceremony. He was addicted by the terror they aroused. He was going to Tyburn: 'My curiosity to see the melancholy spectacle of the executions was so strong,' the young Boswell remarked in 1763, 'that I could not resist it, although I was sensible that I would suffer much from it.'<sup>602</sup> 'There was a vast crowd, and a prodigious heavy rain fell', he sketched a public execution in Newgate in 1785, 'I was quite unnerved. I stayed and saw them all cut down, carried into Newgate, and stretched dead upon a table'. He looked at the face of an executed which was 'neither black nor distorted', and he concluded that 'the quick transition life to death struck me'. He was very uneasy.<sup>603</sup>

Boswell's fascination could easily bring to mind some psychological explanations but it might be more fruitful to turn attention to the pre-Romantic tradition of the Gothic horror and the early criminal biography – in fact Boswell referred to the famous *Lives of the Convicts* which included biographies of the most notorious criminals of the age. The prison of Newgate was the centre of his Gothic imagination: 'I recalled the notions of my youth about that great gaol, Beggar's Opera, etc.,'<sup>604</sup> he noted in 1785. He had read in the *Lives* so much about Tyburn that he had 'a sort of horrid eagerness to be there,' he wrote in the *London Journal*. Boswell wished to see the last behaviour of a certain Paul Lewis, 'the handsome fellow whom I had seen the day before'. He wanted to receive as exact impression of the scene as possible: 'I took Captain Temple with me, and he and I got upon a scaffold very near the fatal tree, so that we could clearly see all the dismal scene.' The desolate disposition was the expected result: 'I was most terribly shocked, and thrown into very deep melancholy'.<sup>605</sup>

The experimental attitude towards feelings and sensations was a highly important aspect of Boswell's relation to reality: according to his aestheticism, life was a work of art, and these dreadful feelings were artist's material. Boswell's remarks on his visit to Newgate confirm this interpretation. He could not see John Wilkes's release from Tower so he continued his tour: 'I then thought I should see prisoners of one kind or other, so I went to Newgate. I stepped into a sort of court before the cells. They were surely most dismal places.' He gave a detailed description of the gloomy milieu, but his main topic of interest was the people sentenced to death: 'Mr. Rice the broker was confined in another part of the house. In the cells were Paul Lewis for robbery and Hannah Diego for theft.' The persons waiting for execution were celebrities of the age, and Boswell shared this common interest: 'Paul [Lewis] who had been in the sea-service and was called Captain, was a genteel, spirited young fellow. He was just a Macheath. He was dressed in a white coat and blue silk vest and silver, with his hair neatly queued and a silver-laced hat, smartly cocked.'<sup>606</sup> When he sketched a portrait of

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<sup>602</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 252.

<sup>603</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 338.

<sup>604</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 331.

<sup>605</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 252.

<sup>606</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 251.

a beau going to gallows, it was typical that the moralist or religious ethos is non-existent in the remark. But more important was the impact which the scene had on his self; he registered meticulously how the experience lowered his spirits: 'I felt myself still more melancholy, Newgate being upon my mind like a black cloud. Poor Lewis was always coming across me. I felt myself dreary at night.'<sup>607</sup> Attending the executions was also a way to test his serenity of mind, and he was content when he could recognize that 'thinking of Newgate and violent deaths hardened me'.<sup>608</sup> 'I never can resist seeing executions', wrote Boswell in 1768, although they had a shocking effect on his nerves, but, he continued that 'by thinking and accustoming myself to them, I can see them quite firmly, though I feel compassion'.<sup>609</sup>

The second half of the eighteenth century saw the birth of the new sensibility towards the violent punishments: public tortures and executions were strongly censured by Beccaria and other reformists, and now, like Michel Foucault has argued, the new milder forms of punishing tried to have an impact on the soul, not directly and openly on the body. Boswell's attitude towards executions was strongly emotional but totally unsentimental; he sought from the public executions strong sensations, they were a kind of mental experiments for him, but he never called into question the system of public punishing and its rationale.

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<sup>607</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 252; see also Boswell, *Italy*, 43, Boswell, *Wife*, 141.

<sup>608</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 331.

<sup>609</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 150.

## IV AUTHENTICITY AND THEATRICALITY

‘We crowd to see those who excel in any art, and surely the highest excellence of art is the art of pleasing, the art of attracting admiration and fondness,’ Boswell wrote in 1776 in his diary.<sup>610</sup> From his youth on he had glorified the polished manners of the highest society, and this admiration had become more intense during his first visit to London when a family friend Lord Eglinton had been sent to shepherd the juvenile runaway planning the conversion to Catholicism. The Earl of Eglinton was an experienced man of the world with a rakish moral code, and he did his best to save the young convert from popish asceticism to worldly delights. In Boswell he found maybe a too receptive apprentice and after this episode the young Scotsman was familiar with the polite pleasures of the town, theatres and especially actresses, fine clothes and finest dinners, witty conversations and fabulous Jockey Club members, pleasure gardens and carnal pleasures and, after all, the complicated secrets of the art of pleasing.<sup>611</sup>

The grand tour to Germany, Switzerland, Italy and France in 1764—1766 was an important stage in his development. ‘M. de La Selle was quite occupied in showing me *des politesses*. There are people,’ he wrote down in Italy, ‘who from good habits delight in serving others. I have little of this, and therefore view with admiration the obliging attention, the alert civility, of others. I thought it would be no bad life to go about profiting by this happy disposition of mankind.’<sup>612</sup> The high aristocratic ethos had been an integral part of Boswell’s theory of politeness from its very beginning. He wrote to Erskine on August 25, 1761: ‘The Boswells, you know, came over from Normandy, with William the Conqueror, and some of us possess the spirit of our ancestors the French. I do for one. A pleasant spirit it is. *Vive la Bagatelle*, is the maxim. A light heart may bid defiance to fortune.’<sup>613</sup> The German princely courts had an enormous impact on him, and this experience strengthened the aristocratic emphasis in his theory of politeness.

Boswell’s conception of politeness was a central element in his self-fashioning project, and an important point of departure in this self-fashioning programme was a notion of his exceptional personality: Boswell had a strong sense of belonging to some unique category of human beings. ‘I am thinking my mind is too delicate, and my feelings too fine for the rough bustle of life’, he wrote in a letter to Erskine on May 8,

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<sup>610</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 361.

<sup>611</sup> Pottle 1966, 46-51; Martin 1999, 68-70.

<sup>612</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 246-7.

<sup>613</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 1.



1762, and he even realized that his frame was ‘too delicate for the British Climate.’<sup>614</sup> He saw a dramatic contrast between his original delicacy and his rough Scottish milieu. Even the most distinguished figures of the Scottish public life could not fulfil his requirements. ‘But I must find one fault with all the Poker Club, as they are called; that is to say, with all that set who associate with David Hume and Robertson. They are doing all that they can to destroy politeness,’ Boswell wrote down in 1763, and in the spirit of his highly snobbish theory of politeness he continued that ‘they would abolish all respect due to rank and external circumstances, and they would live like a kind of literary barbarians.’<sup>615</sup>

Although the art of pleasing was strictly connected with social rank, it also required, according to Boswell, the active attitude towards the self. The early modern culture of self-fashioning was purely secular and its techniques differed from the Christian asceticism which aimed to mortify carnal desires. At the heart of this attitude, which mostly derived from the Renaissance, was an aspiration for aesthetical perfection; cultivation of life as an object of art. According to Stephen Greenblatt, in the Renaissance Europe, there appeared ‘to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.’<sup>616</sup> The new culture of self-fashioning differed from the imitation of Christ and especially it differed from the Augustinian conception of man as irrevocably sinful and incapable of changing his life on his own; the Renaissance humanist self-fashioning was ‘linked to manners or demeanor, particularly that of the elite.’<sup>617</sup> Politeness was the crucial dimension of this self-fashioning in Renaissance and *l’ancien régime* Europe. The courtly and high aristocratic code of politeness put emphasis on external behaviour; the public self was seen as relatively independent of inner qualities and as a malleable entity. Disguising of one’s personality as a prerequisite of polite sociability was a commonplace in the conduct books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This interpretation of politeness included a theatrical element: the outer self was a consciously constructed artefact, which aimed at a calculated effect in the scenes of social life – the ‘art of pleasing in society’ was in the core of this culture of politeness.<sup>618</sup>

Boswell formulated his gentlemanly ideal in his autobiographical texts. This figure was very similar with the Renaissance and Baroque ideal of courtier: constant and serene person who hid his inner feelings; easy and witty; polite and flexible in social occasions; capable of playing many roles on the scene of fashionable society. This was the aim of the self-fashioning project, but the whole picture was more complicated: Boswell characterized his exceptional personality with expressions like ‘a man of fancy

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<sup>614</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 106.

<sup>615</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 300.

<sup>616</sup> Greenblatt 1980, 2.

<sup>617</sup> Greenblatt 1980, 2-3.

<sup>618</sup> See Bryson 1998; Peltonen 2003.

and whim' or 'a man of imagination and feeling'; he saw himself as an immediately emotional and imaginative man.

Philip Carter has argued that Boswell's attitude towards politeness had two layers. On the one hand, Boswell's attitudes towards politeness belonged mainly to the new interpretation of politeness stated by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and some other Augustan humanists. This "coffee-house politeness" had anti courtly and anti-aristocratic tone; it emphasized honesty and sincerity instead of theatrical formalities of the courtly politeness although it shared the requirement of reciprocal pleasing with the older aristocratic code. On the other hand, Carter recognizes a sentimental component in Boswell's attitude; particularly 'in his search of love we can see Boswell fully, and self-consciously, adopting the characteristics of the man of feeling', and, according to Carter, Boswell's acceptance of male displaying of emotions would connect him to the culture of sensibility. I would suggest that the central elements of his theory of politeness came from the courtly and aristocratic culture of politeness which was disputed by Addison, Steele, and Johnson; he used Addison and Johnson as exemplars of the men of civility and politeness, but the ideals of politeness he projected onto them belonged more to the courtly assemblies and fashionable drawing-rooms than to coffee-houses and gentlemen's clubs. Boswell did also belong to the culture of sensibility, as Carter rightly argues, but I would argue that he was part of it because of his immediate and emotional attitude towards people and things, not because of his reflections on the basic conditions of politeness which followed very different tracks.<sup>619</sup>

My main argument in what follows is that, although Boswell was an Addisonian London gentleman *par excellence*, his theory of politeness differed fundamentally from that of Addison, Steele and Dr Johnson. Boswell saw that politeness should be based on theatrical illusion and concealing of one's "real" self. Only this made possible pleasing and creative sociability because masks and formal codes of politeness – flattery among them – enabled enjoying of each other's company and reciprocal pleasing without hurting other person's integrity. Furthermore, theatricality brought an element of illusion and creative imagination to social intercourse. The effect of the alternative, truth speaking in company provided a striking contrast: when people were open in social occasions and spoke truth without sheltering masks, they irrevocably injured each other and lowered their own and other persons dignity. Of course, Addison, Steele and Johnson never supported absolute truthfulness in company; they also saw the reciprocal pleasing as a central component in human sociability. The dividing factors were theatricality which made people lose their fixed identity, on the one hand, and flattery which created morally and politically disastrous dependencies between people and so was a fatal threat to personal and political freedom, on the other. Boswell's interpretation of politeness included moral distinctions only in marginal occasions; the

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<sup>619</sup> Carter 2001, 58, 65–6, 183–201.

emphasis was on the outward effect of behaviour, aesthetic fashioning of the polite self and theatrical appearance on the stage of fashionable society.

Moral neutrality was a very rare position in eighteenth-century British discussions on politeness – Bernard Mandeville and Lord Chesterfield were important exceptions – because the care of one’s moral self was an integral component of the Lockean, Addisonian and Johnsonian theory of human sociability which without inward civility degenerated into deteriorated play with masks. Formally Boswell’s interpretation of politeness came very close to Lord Chesterfield’s but his ethos was very different: for Boswell, politeness was an end in itself, both a product of mutual benevolence and a well of aesthetic pleasure. His view was far from rational calculation; on the contrary, Boswell’s attitude included a strong element of emotional and imaginative identification with polite sociability. In short, for Boswell, politeness was a central component of aesthetically motivated self-fashioning.

### *The Court and the City*

Historians usually recognize a kind of rupture in the European culture of politeness at the beginning of early modern period. Anna Bryson, for instance, argues that medieval code of lordship with its expressions of servitude and graciousness in the sphere of noble household was replaced by the code of urbanity which realized in the courtly and urban milieu of London.<sup>620</sup> The role of court in the eighteenth-century British culture has been discussed recently: John Brewer and Linda Colley have shared the common notion that the court was only one cultural and social centre among others, but, on the other hand, Hannah Smith has emphasized that the two first Georges, contrary to the commonplace interpretation, enjoyed a strong popularity and the monarchy had a highly important place in the common imagery.<sup>621</sup> Markku Peltonen has argued that early modern duelling, in spite of some prima facie similarities, was not a continuation of the medieval tournament institution but has to be examined from the perspective of the early modern culture of politeness born in the courts of High Renaissance Italy.<sup>622</sup> The rupture was not absolute, of course: John Gillingham has found twelfth-century courtesy books written both in Latin and Anglo-Norman which, according to him, foreshadowed the early modern gentlemanly ideals.<sup>623</sup> Dilwyn Knox has emphasized the

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<sup>620</sup> See Bryson 1998.

<sup>621</sup> Brewer 1997, 5–20; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*. New Haven and London, 1992, 199–200; Hannah Smith, *Georgian Monarchy: Politics and Culture, 1714–1760*. Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>622</sup> See Peltonen 2003 and Peltonen 2005.

<sup>623</sup> See John Gillingham, ‘From *Civilitas* to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (sixth series) (2002), 12.

role of monastic rules of behaviour as a background of Erasmian and North European humanist codes of politeness.<sup>624</sup>

In spite of these new nuances, the main currents of early modern culture of politeness can be personified to two seventeenth-century figures: Baldassare Castiglione and Desiderius Erasmus. The context of the former was the courtly culture of High Renaissance Italy tinged by Neoplatonism, and the latter was a central author of Christian humanist interpretation of politeness. According to salon and courtly politeness of early modern Europe, the most influent conduct book is without doubt Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528). The book is a classical formulation of the Renaissance *uomo universale* ideal, in which the art of socializing in courtly milieu had a highly important role. These skills required rigid practice because the aim was the impression of perfect naturalness, even nonchalance; a quality which Castiglione called *sprezzatura*. It was 'honest dissimulation', an art which refused to uncover its virtuosity. The courtier was a kind of artist whose material was speech, dress, and body language – behaviour in general. This ideal was saturated by Neo-platonic aestheticism, and its ethos was highly elitist: the book was directed to the sophisticated high society which identified itself in the first place through the cultural capital; the main barrier was the distinction between cultured elite which mastered the codes of good taste and polite behaviour and the others regardless of their rank (although the traditional estate privileges did not by no means lose their importance).

*Sprezzatura* had a strong theatrical element; the courtier was always aware of his role on the stage of social life and he constantly fashioned his behaviour according to the present audience. Like irony, *sprezzatura* included complex and veiled messages which were directed to the selected group of *connoisseurs* who could interpret the refined expressions. The other part of the audience was only fascinated by the brilliant performance, without being capable to decipher the subtle meanings. The ideal was an easy and modest behaviour but the limited circle of the fashionable society was conscious that it was an extremely polished artistic construction including messages which had to be interpreted.<sup>625</sup> This dissimulation was the central topic in the discussions on politeness in the early modern and eighteenth-century Europe. The moral critique of politeness also concentrated on the theatrical and illusory nature of politeness. When performing something else than what he really was, the man lost his identity and so spoiled his moral essence. Furthermore, politeness also corrupted the sincere social intercourse and damaged true love, friendship and conviviality. The counter-argument was that, on the contrary, perfect honesty destroyed sociability because then people hurt each other by telling inconvenient truths of their fellow-beings. So the core of

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<sup>624</sup> See Dilwyn Knox, 'Disciplina The Monastic and Clerical Origins of European Civility', in *Renaissance Society and Culture* (ed. John Monfasani and Ronald G. Musto). New York, 1991.

<sup>625</sup> Eduardo Saccone, 'Grazia, Sprezzatura, Affettazione in the Courtier', in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (ed. Robert W. Hanning and David Rosand). New Haven and London, 1983, 56–57.

sociability was the reciprocal pleasing – and this demanded both respect for other persons integrity and hiding one’s own faults and weaknesses.

The Erasmian Christian humanism offered a different perspective on politeness. This tradition stressed the correspondence between inner moral qualities and outward behaviour; polite behaviour was an expression of a developed moral self and fundamentally it came from the Christian love for one’s neighbour. Erasmus emphasized the role of Christian virtues like piety, modesty and continence in the education of manners. The cultivation of outer behaviour did not aim to theatrical performance but development of inner moral qualities. These two interpretations were not totally exclusive; they had many common features, and in later theories of politeness they intersected in many ways. The early modern discourse of politeness therefore always included these two poles: theatricality and artificiality versus authenticity and sincerity.

In spite of the different foundations of the theories of politeness, there was one axiom which was common to all: the principle of reciprocal pleasing. This meant that, in social occasions, a gentleman had to adapt to the mood and sensibility of a company; and he had to be conscious of the reactions of others to his behaviour: he had to reflect himself being aware of the audience. The definitions of the art of pleasing were very similar in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. According to the anonymous conduct book *The Art of Complaisance* (1673), politeness was an art of controlling our speech and behaviour so that we can win our interlocutor’s love and respect to our side.<sup>626</sup> The central idea in *The English Theophrastus* (1708) was nearly identical: politeness required the control of our speech and behaviour so that other people received a more favourable impression of us and of themselves.<sup>627</sup>

Debates on politeness had an exceptionally important role in the eighteenth-century reflections on urban civilization. After the Glorious Revolution, politeness got a more informal interpretation in the coffee-house scene of early eighteenth-century London in which John Locke, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele were the central figures. The new mode of politeness included the axiom of reciprocal pleasing, but the general ethos was much more egalitarian than in the courtly and aristocratic code. The most important difference was the attitude towards the relation between the inner self and the outer behaviour. Philip Carter refers to John Locke's educational thought which founded the education of the manners on the inner moral qualities. The crucial aim was a correspondence between thoughts and actions. Locke used term ‘inward civility’ to describe the morally high quality of inner life which expressed itself in outward behaviour. A person who had achieved a right moral character behaved easily and politely. This view resembled the Erasmian Christian-

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<sup>626</sup> S. C., *The Art of Complaisance, or, the Means to Oblige in Conversation*. London, 1673.

<sup>627</sup> *The English Theophrastus, or the Manners of the Age. Being the Modern Characters of the Court, the Town, and the City*. London, 1708.

humanist position and it was closely followed by Addison's, Steele's and Shaftesbury's interpretations. The central event was the appearance of the more informal urban culture of politeness which had a seat especially in coffee-houses but also in theatres, pleasure gardens etc. The new interpretation differed from theatrical courtly politeness. Reciprocal pleasing and respect for a fellow creature's dignity were the crucial points in the new code, too, but pleasing was restricted by the demands of honesty and sincerity: the real gentleman, Locke and Shaftesbury, Addison and Steele argued, never resorted to theatrical dissimulation, much less flattery.<sup>628</sup> An important phenomenon was the infiltration of the Evangelical-Christian ideals into the gentlemanly models in the second half of the century; especially there were overlaps between Christian and sentimental patterns. This, of course, meant a drawing away from the early modern aristocratic ideals.<sup>629</sup>

According to J.G.A. Pocock, the birth of the culture of politeness was parallel with the development of the commercial society in the eighteenth century; fundamentally politeness was a creation of commercial classes.<sup>630</sup> Following Pocock, many recent scholars have emphasized the shift at the turn of seventeenth and eighteenth century, and the eighteenth century politeness has been seen as "middle class", urban and relatively independent of the courtly code of politeness. Roy Porter connects the development of urban politeness to the changes in the urban geography of London. When corporate institutions were declining and the urban space was differentiating, coffee-houses, parks, theatres and pleasure gardens became stages of social life where people encountered without knowledge of status of other people. In these public and semi public spheres, politeness worked as a medium to orient in the anonymous and polyphonic social milieu. Principally these new commercial institutions were open to (nearly) all, but a full participation required the mastering of codes of politeness. Politeness and the cultivation of taste also created coherence to the world divided by religious, political and economic conflicts.<sup>631</sup> According to several authors, the urbanization of politeness meant the democratization of politeness; it became more informal and detached from the courtly codes based on dissimulation. It has been seen that the conduct books directed to the rising middle classes reflected the philosophy of consensus, tolerance and reciprocal pleasing and serving.<sup>632</sup> Paul Langford has argued

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<sup>628</sup> See Carter 2001; Stephen Copley, 'Commerce, conversation and politeness in the early eighteenth-century periodical', in *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 18 (1995); Klein 1989.

<sup>629</sup> See William van Reyk, 'Christian Ideals of Manliness in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', in *The Historical Journal*, 52, 4 (2009).

<sup>630</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*. Cambridge, 1985, 37–50.

<sup>631</sup> John Brewer, "'The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious.'" Attitudes towards the Culture as a Commodity', in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600—1800: Image, Object, Text* (ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer). London and New York, 1995, 345–349; Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. London, 1983, 322; Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Werneys 1660—1720*. Oxford, 1999, 87—109.

<sup>632</sup> Jacques Carré, 'Introduction', in *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600—1900* (ed. Jacques Carré). Leiden – New York – Köln, 1994, 5–6.

that the crucial phenomenon in the eighteenth century culture of politeness was the diffusion of civilized manners among the middle social strata; the simplifying imitation of the manners of the high society was an unifying factor among the middle classes.<sup>633</sup> Peter Borsay has emphasized the role of civilizing ethos in the eighteenth-century British urbanism. According to him, in the core of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English ‘urban renaissance’ was an ‘underlying mission to rescue the nation from barbarity and ignorance.’<sup>634</sup> Literature, theatre as well as design and architecture had a highly important role in this civilizing process; the high aesthetic quality of living environment was seen to have positive impacts on manners and morals. Besides polite behaviour, the polite culture included a wide set of cultural practices.<sup>635</sup>

Lawrence E. Klein has likewise argued that there was a shift in the cultural codes after the Glorious Revolution and that the eighteenth-century urban politeness was a fundamentally new innovation. Klein connects the rise of the new culture of politeness to the Whig-spirited urban milieu, and Shaftesbury, Addison and Steele were the key figures in this process. Klein recognizes four main characteristics in the “Whig-politeness”. First, politeness controlled self’s relations to others in social interaction. Secondly, in the context of politeness, the principle of reciprocal pleasing ruled social occasions. Thirdly, politeness included a certain technical-formal element: it was the know-how of managing the social relations; a competence to refine the raw material of human sociability. The fourth significant feature was equality: the mastery of conventions, learning, and familiarity with fashionable sociability offered the means to equal dialogue among the polite society. Because the polite conversation was the central dimension of politeness, equality in this context required the reciprocal changing of the roles of speaker and listener.<sup>636</sup>

Klein sees the new culture of politeness essentially as a Whig project. The third Earl of Shaftesbury was the key figure in his conception of “Whig-politeness” which combined republican political ideals with requirements of cultured sociability. The seventeenth-century Puritan republicanism had been extremely suspicious of polished sociability – Andrew Fletcher, for instance, saw that the sophisticated court culture of the Italian High Renaissance had corrupted originally free and martial communities – and the forms of art based on illusion like theatre and opera were particularly deteriorating because they had lost the connection with veracity. While the Puritan republicans had seen the austere Spartan society as an ideal, Shaftesbury argued that the pursuit of eloquence in the classical Athens had both supported Republican virtues and inspired the qualified aesthetical culture and the culture of politeness.

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<sup>633</sup> Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727—1783*. Oxford, 1989, 65–67.

<sup>634</sup> Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in The Provincial Town 1660—1770*. Oxford, 1989, 257.

<sup>635</sup> Borsay 1989, 257—71.

<sup>636</sup> Klein 1994, 4–5.



On the other hand, Anna Bryson and Markku Peltonen have emphasised the close connections between courtly and urban forms of politeness as well as the continuity of the English culture of politeness from the late sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. Peltonen has argued against Pocock's view that politeness in its post Glorious Revolution sense was a Whiggish and commercial phenomenon. According to Pocock, the classical republican ideal of virtue was transformed by modern Whigs into the ideal of politeness which was a part of their ideology of commerce, enlightenment and progress. In a commercial society, the function of politeness was to refine the passions and polish the manners according to the requirements of commercial society. Peltonen argues that the early modern courtly code of politeness originally set by the Italian Renaissance humanism had a strong impact on the British culture of politeness until the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact, the "commercial" politeness borrowed many central elements from earlier code of politeness. Peltonen does not deny that there appeared a new interpretation of politeness in eighteenth-century Britain, but he emphasises that this was not a totalizing *Zeitgeist* but one current among others.<sup>637</sup>

### *The Honest Gentleman*

The most prominent representative of the courtly politeness in eighteenth-century Britain was Philip Dormer Stanhope, the Fourth Earl of Chesterfield. His letters to his son, which were published posthumously in 1774, raised censure because of their cynical and utilitarian ethos. Famous is Samuel Johnson's saying that they taught 'the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing-master.' According to Philip Carter, in the core of the so-called Chesterfield controversy was 'his apparently unrepentant exploitation of the potential gap between external polish and morals.'<sup>638</sup> Carter argues that the reaction was partly motivated by the anti-aristocratic sentiment, which connected Chesterfield's cynicism with the aristocratic "corruption", and partly by the rising cult of sensibility which emphasized sincerity and authentic feeling in the human intercourse.<sup>639</sup> Indeed, Chesterfield was a representative of the vanishing époque; the Machiavellian naturalism and the Renaissance theatricality were combined in the instructive letters. The Earl wrote to his son:

The art of pleasing is a very necessary one to possess; but a very difficult one to acquire. It can hardly be reduced to rules; and your own good sense and observation will teach you more of it than I can. "Do as you would be done by", is the surest method that I know of pleasing. Observe carefully what

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<sup>637</sup> Bryson 1998; Peltonen 2003.

<sup>638</sup> Carter 2001, 79.

<sup>639</sup> Carter 2001, 79-80.

pleases you in others, and probably the same things in you will please others.<sup>640</sup>

The art of pleasing required both the intensive examination of the polite world and a certain attitude towards oneself; it demanded fashioning of the self according to the principles of the art of pleasing. Chesterfield's conception of politeness was extremely conformist; one of the central axioms of art of pleasing was to accept the mood of the present company. 'Take the tone of the company that you are in' he wrote to his son, 'be serious, gay, or even trifling, as you find the present humour of the company: this is an attention due from every individual to the majority'.<sup>641</sup> But maybe even more important component was the use of impersonal mask in company. This was highly important for two reasons: it was extremely provoking to uncover one's intimacies to the company, but, above all, this kind of openness weakened ineluctably one's position in the competitive fashionable society. He continued the letter: 'Of all things, banish the egotism out of your conversation, and never think of entertaining people with your personal concerns or private affairs; though they are interesting to you, they are tedious and impertinent to everybody else: besides that, one cannot keep one's own private affairs too secret'.<sup>642</sup>

Chesterfield emphasized strongly the outer expressions of good breeding; it might have some inner substance but 'virtue and learning, like gold, have their intrinsic value; but if they are not polished, they certainly lose a great deal of their lustre; and even polished brass will pass upon more people than rough gold'.<sup>643</sup> Later he returned to the topic and reminded his son that 'manners must adorn knowledge, and smooth its way through the world. Like a great rough diamond, it may do very well in a closet by way of curiosity, and also for its intrinsic value; but it will never be worn, nor shine, it is not polished'.<sup>644</sup>

Lord Chesterfield warned his son of behaviour which he called in French *mauvaise honte*: 'This kind of bashfulness, which is justly called by the French *mauvaise honte*, is the distinguishing character of an English booby, who is frightened out of his wits when people of fashion speak to him; and, when he is to answer them, blushes, stammers, can hardly get out what he would say, and becomes really ridiculous from a groundless fear of being laughed at.'<sup>645</sup> In general, he considered the French manners to be a model; the French, on the contrary to the English who 'sont pour l'ordinaire nigauds, et n'ont pas ces manières aisées et libres, mais en même temps polies, qu'ont les Français. Remarquez donc les Français, et imitez-les, dans leur manière de se présenter, et

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<sup>640</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1035.

<sup>641</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1036.

<sup>642</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1036.

<sup>643</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 877.

<sup>644</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1174–5.

<sup>645</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* II, 447.

d'aborder les gens'<sup>646</sup>, he advised his son. According to Chesterfield, politeness was so essential to the French, that they 'call an honest man and a civil man by the same name, of *hônnette homme*; and the Romans called civility *humanitas*, as thinking it inseparable from humanity.'<sup>647</sup>

Chesterfield recognized in French sociability a quality which was very similar to Castiglione's *sprezzatura*: 'Besides being civil...the perfection of good-breeding, is, to be civil with ease...For this, you should observe the French people, who excel in it, and whose politeness seems as easy and natural as any other part of their conversation.'<sup>648</sup> It was absolutely not a question of easiness and naturalness in the sense of openness or sincerity; on the contrary, the social masks of the French were so polished that they gave an impression of naturalness. When Chesterfield had compared rough gold with polished brass, he continued that what 'a number of sins does the cheerful, easy good-breeding of the French frequently cover? Many of them want common sense, many more common learning; but, in general, they make up so much, by their manner, for those defects, that, frequently, they pass undiscovered.'<sup>649</sup>

The eighteenth-century British critique of courtly politeness had two main targets. First, the theatrical dissimulation made a man to lose his authentic selfhood; when living in the world of polite compliances, a man would lose his sense of truth and lie. Secondly, the idea of fashioning of the self as an object of art was recognized fundamentally un-Christian; the pursuit of outward beauty was hubris and was disastrous to the salvation of the soul. The other extreme stance in the eighteenth-century British discussions on politeness was the Dissenter one; it continued the Puritan critique of court and politeness and its Augustine ethos was strongly contradictory to the Humanist culture of self-fashioning and the theatricality of the aristocratic politeness. In his sermon *The Polite and Fashionable diversions of the Age, destructive to Soul and Body*, preached in 1740 at Blackheath, a famous Methodist preacher George Whitefield condemned the forms of polite sociability one by one. The text for the day was from Matthew xvi. 26: 'For what is a Man profited, if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul? Or what shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?'<sup>650</sup> 'What Profit will the Thought then yield of your being rich, or great, or powerful, in this World, when you have lost your Soul for indulging yourselves in the Pleasures and polite Diversions of this Age?'<sup>651</sup>, Whitefield asked. Against the background of his Augustinian conception of the Man – 'you were lost by Nature, and your Souls are as black as Blackness, they were sunk into the Temper of the Devil, and if Christ had not come to

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<sup>646</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* II, 392.

<sup>647</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* II, 526.

<sup>648</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* II, 447.

<sup>649</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 877-8.

<sup>650</sup> George Whitefield *The Polite and Fashionable Diversions of the Age, Destructive to Soul and Body*. London, 1740, 3.

<sup>651</sup> Whitefield, *Polite and Fashionable Diversions*, 4.

have made Satisfaction for them, with Devils and damned Spirits must they have dwelt to all Eternity'<sup>652</sup> – the idea of the cultivation of human nature was extremely dangerous.

Indeed, external beauty was not the reflection of inner beauty; on the contrary: polite society, with its sophisticated pleasures and pursuit of beautiful life, was a deceitful illusion. In the core of this corruption was dissimulation, the attempt to be something other than one really was. So it was not surprising that the sermon begun with the comment on theatre: 'What are the Playhouses but the Nurseries of Vice, the Sink of Debauchery, the Destruction of all Religion? What good can proceed from those Places where God is prophaned, the Devil honour'd, your Time mispent, your Souls endangered'.<sup>653</sup>

There was also a milder religiously motivated interpretation of politeness in eighteenth-century Britain. A certain W. Howdell made a counterattack against Dissenters' fire-and-brimstone-attitude under the title *Religion productive of Joy, and consistent with Politeness* promising wipe off the Aspersion that have been cast upon it by the METHODISTS'. The text was from Philippians: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice'<sup>654</sup>. The author had chosen the words because he had noticed that the core message of the Christian religion had been represented 'in a false and disadvantageous Light, painting it in the darkest, and most gloomy Colours, and giving it a discouraging and frightful Aspect'.<sup>655</sup> This was a fatal misinterpretation; God intended, when He created man, that happiness, not misery should be the *condition humaine*. Following the calculation typical to the natural religion, Howdell wrote that 'he actually did intend, we should enjoy as much Happiness in this Life as is consistent with our greatest and supreme Good. As God's Goodness was the principal Motive inducing Him to create us, so the same Goodness must allow us to consult our Happiness.'<sup>656</sup> The logical consequence was that religion was '...the best Means of attaining true Happiness, and the best Preservative against Moroseness and Austerity.'<sup>657</sup> Howdell made a strict distinction between two interpretations of the Christian faith. The one was based on sudden awakening and included censorious attitude towards worldly things. This kind of stern religiousness was dangerous because 'Spiritual Pride and Presumption, are the common and ordinary Effects of Enthusiasm...This makes them proud of their own Opinions, and naturally leads them undervalue that Knowledge which is acquired by Human means.'<sup>658</sup> This form of religion was hostile towards joy and pleasure and poisoned life with dark melancholy.

The other interpretation had obvious similarities with the humanist idea of self-cultivation and gradual perfection. The real change in human behaviour and mental

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<sup>652</sup> Whitefield, *Polite and Fashionable Diversions*, 4.

<sup>653</sup> Whitefield, *Polite and Fashionable Diversions*, 7.

<sup>654</sup> W. Howdell *Religion productive of Joy, and consistent with Politeness*. York, 1744, 5.

<sup>655</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 5.

<sup>656</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 6.

<sup>657</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 7.

<sup>658</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 22.

qualities could never happen by a single act but ‘ordinarily, by a uniform Course, or Habit of Virtue, by him who gradually ripens into Perfection, who grows in Grace ‘till he comes unto a perfect Man, unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ’.<sup>659</sup> The preacher found more support from the Scripture: ‘How is this Change which is wrought in one Moment, reconcilable with St *Peter*’s Gradation of Virtues? *Giving all Diligence add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness; and to Brotherly-Kindness, Charity.*’<sup>660</sup> A synonym of this process was good breeding. The principal aim of Howdell’s reasoning was not to formulate his own interpretation of the nature of Christian belief but to reconcile religion with the highly controversial the politeness

If the End of Good-breeding is to exalt and refine the Nature of Man, what can exalt and refine it more, than the religion of Christ? This not only checks and restrains all irregular and disorderly appetites that debase and degrade us, but pares away cuts off every Thing that’s wild and savage in us. It not only raises us infinitely above the Brute Creation, but when practis’d to the highest Perfection exalts the Man into an Angel: So that the Christian Religion is so far from discountenancing Politeness and Good-breeding, that it helps promote them, and would be more engaging to many who think themselves fine Gentlemen, was it impartially examined, and better understood by them.<sup>661</sup>

The endeavour to create a synthesis between the early modern humanist conception of politeness and the Christian demand of love of one’s neighbour and reciprocal benevolence was a kind of mainstream in the early eighteenth-century British culture of politeness. The so called moral weeklies had a key role in this process.

The new culture of politeness introduced by Addison, Steele and Shaftesbury in the first decades of the eighteenth century was a kind of synthesis of the Cavalier and Puritan cultural influences; it was based on the Renaissance humanist idea of politeness as the art of pleasing in company but it had an audible Christian overtone. ‘I shall begin with him we usually call a *Gentleman*, or Man of Conversation,’ wrote *The Tatler* and continued that ‘the most necessary Talent therefore in a Man of Conversation, which is what we ordinarily intend by a Fine Gentleman, is a good Judgment.’<sup>662</sup> The new gentleman was the man of sense and the man of sociability, but the ideal had also a strong moral dimension; the inner self and the outward behaviour had a strong connection in this interpretation: ‘The Motive of Man’s Life is seen in all his Actions,’ wrote *The Tatler*, and *The Spectator* added that the ‘Cloathing of our Minds certainly

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<sup>659</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 20.

<sup>660</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 20–21.

<sup>661</sup> Howdell, *Religion productive of Joy*, 23–24.

<sup>662</sup> *The Tatler*, I, 165.

ought to be regarded before that of our Bodies.’<sup>663</sup> The real gentlemanly ethos was manifested by the ‘Decency of Manners’, the ‘Evenness of Desire,’ and the ‘Simplicity of Behaviour’; the true gentleman lived ‘under the Regulation of Virtue’ because the ‘Life without Rules of Morality is a wayward uneasy Being, with Snatches only of Pleasure.’<sup>664</sup> This ‘old *English* Plainness and Sincerity’ was under threat because of the corruptive impacts of the ‘Foreign Manners and Fashions;’ the correspondence between thought and speech was lost in the fashionable politeness, and so the ‘World is grown so full of Dissimulation and Compliment, that Men’s words are hardly any Signification of their Thoughts,’ wrote Richard Steele in *The Spectator*<sup>665</sup>. ‘Sincerity is true Wisdom,’ continued Steele later in the weekly, and he concluded that ‘Integrity hath many Advantages over all the fine and artificial ways of Dissimulation and Deceit.’<sup>666</sup> The good judgement based on the healthy common sense, the moderation of emotions, plainness, honesty, and benevolent politeness were the crucial features of the gentlemanly ideal of the moral weeklies. It was a kind of counter-figure to the foppish and theatrical continental courtier.

### *The Delights of Civilization*

Boswell’s general view of civilization emphasized complex and sophisticated forms of culture, polished manners among them, and he polemicized against the glorification of savagery, wilderness, and rough and archaic forms of social life. He identified elegance and cultivated manners with the metropolitan way of life: ‘I am much entertained with your rural triumph over *us men of London*,’ he wrote to Sir Alexander Dick on April 30, 1778, ‘I know not but to the pure natural mind the pleasures and beauties of the country are superior to those of a city. But I have habits far different from those of pure nature. Besides, may it not be maintained that a mind in the state that mine is, is more civilised?’<sup>667</sup> In the discussions on the benefits and menaces of civilization, Boswell was in accord with Hume and Smith’s conception of civilization as a progression towards more complex and sophisticated forms of life, and against Rousseau’s “primitivism”, in defending the complex forms of culture and the value of sophisticated social life. ‘You are tempted to join Rousseau in preferring the savage state,’ he wrote to Temple on February 1, 1767, ‘I am so too, at times. When jaded with business, or when tormented with the passions of civilized life, I could fly to the woods... But these are the sallies of desperation. Philosophy teacheth us to be moderate, to be patient, to expect a gradual

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<sup>663</sup> *The Spectator*, I, 322-325.

<sup>664</sup> *The Tatler*, I, 347-352.

<sup>665</sup> *The Spectator*, I, 430-1.

<sup>666</sup> *The Spectator*, III, 314.

<sup>667</sup> Boswell, *Letters*, Vol. II, 276.

progress of refinement and felicity.<sup>668</sup> Boswell was a man of letters, not a philosophical spirit at all, but he had substantial polite learning and had reflected, on a quite concrete level, on some central themes of the contemporary cultural debates. For him, nature was raw material demanding cultivation; this point of view was formulated in the diary of his youth: ‘What I admire is nature improved by art, for art certainly may and does improve nature.’ Civilized life was more productive than uncivilized. ‘I said more of that pleasure in civilized society than in natural,’ he wrote about an intimate conversation in his journal, ‘bees make more honey in hive than in fields.’<sup>669</sup> Boswell was consistent in his critique of Rousseau’s glorification of savagery. He remarked in Italy:

I disputed against Rousseau’s notion that the savage life is the least unhappy, for the savages have none of the elegant pleasures of polished society to counterbalance their pains, and the quantity of enjoyment in an Indian tribe is hardly worthy existing for. Besides, the savages are torn with the fiercer passions, and are even tormented with ennui, for we are told by travellers that when the savage has killed his prey, roasted it, and eat it, and having no appetites to rouse him sees half a sun which he knows not how to employ, he sits down pensive and sad by the seashore, and with a gloomy attention eyes the rolling of the waves.<sup>670</sup>

He found total unnaturalness disagreeable but above all he disliked rudeness, frankness and lack of elegance. He wrote in the *London Journal*: ‘What I admire is nature improved by art, for art certainly may and does improve nature.’<sup>671</sup> In the essay *On Excess* (1778) Boswell introduced his favourite theme of savagery as an inferior state of existence:

The savages devour with greediness immoderate quantities of such rude sustenance as they have; and travellers uniformly concur in attesting their violent fondness for strong drink. In civilized nations, more elegant but not less effectual methods of intemperance are practised. Excess in eating is stimulated and increased by the infinite exertions of the art of cookery; and excess in drinking is promoted by the seducing taste of rich wines, by the gaiety and splendour associated with grand entertainments, and by mingling love and friendship, amiable and valuable qualities, with the heath and hurry of spirits raising intoxication.<sup>672</sup>

In one of his three essays named *On Love* (1778) Boswell also dealt with the idea of civilization as refined nature. ‘The *desire* which is implanted in us for the enjoyment of

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<sup>668</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 53-54.

<sup>669</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 239.

<sup>670</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 117-8.

<sup>671</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 177.

<sup>672</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 37.



sexual pleasure with the other sex, is no more a passion of the *mind* than hunger or thirst is,' he commenced the essay, but then he noticed that imagination had raised love above the pure gratification of appetite and created the sophisticated forms of art and sociability around this passion.<sup>673</sup> Boswell shared a typical Enlightenment conception of civilization as the adulthood of mankind. 'Savages in general,' he wrote in the essay *On Youth & Age* (1778), 'may be looked upon as children during the whole of their lives, on account of the very scanty share of knowledge which they possess.'<sup>674</sup> Boswell had a good example when he remembered that the Eskimos who were to be shown in London: 'The father and mother seemed to have their wonder and risibility excited by the same petty trifling objects which touched the fancy of *Dickizuma* their child. Nor did he, who was said to be a reverend priest upon the coast of Labrador, convince me that he was much wiser.'<sup>675</sup> Boswell recognized that the Eskimo child was more playful than his parents but supposed that this difference was similar to the difference between a kitten and a grown cat.

Boswell had a common early modern attitude that both childhood and the uncivilized state are comparable to the animal state of being, and Captain Cook's travel accounts had confirmed the opinion.<sup>676</sup> According to them, the people of the Southern hemisphere 'laughed a great deal; for that they were amused with very small matters ... they were quite volatile and inattentive, and would ask a variety of questions in rapid succession, without waiting till they received answers.'<sup>677</sup> Boswell stated that such titillations of inquisitiveness indicated a 'mean state of mind' because the cultivated understanding is characterized by 'noble, ardent, persevering curiosity'.<sup>678</sup> This viewpoint excluded the romantic interpretations of the happy savagery or innocent childhood: 'surely we are formed to enjoy a kind of happiness superior to that of mere animal life, and the pleasures of the senses. Intellectual felicity affords a much higher delight to those who are capable of relishing it.'<sup>679</sup> Boswell's romantic sensibility manifested itself in his emphasizing of fancy, whim, imagination and immediate emotional experience, but he never idealized innocence, ignorance or archaic forms of life. On the contrary, the most civilized forms of life were the object of his romantic longing.

In some texts, Boswell noticed the possibility that civilization could degenerate and having passed its peak civilization could return to new barbarism. The attitude might have echoes from the ancient and Renaissance cyclical conception of history. He compared the over-civilized life style of fashionable society to savagery. There were some striking similarities: pride of idleness, shortsightedness, the concentration on

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<sup>673</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 68—76.

<sup>674</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 61.

<sup>675</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 61.

<sup>676</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 61.

<sup>677</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 62.

<sup>678</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 62.

<sup>679</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 62.

vulgar entertainments like singing, eating, gaming and sleeping and, above all, the lack of interest in intellectually demanding topics. He wrote in the essay *On Savages & the Mode* (1779):

The savages have very narrow having little knowledge except what concerns their hunting and war. And their merriment when examined, will be found to arise from very trifling causes. Here too the resemblance holds between them and very fine people, whose knowledge is limited to their amusements, scandal and petty quarrels; and whose jests are so slender that they are perceptible only to themselves, and that too but for the instant.<sup>680</sup>

But the most alarming symptom of sinking cultural standards was the decay of politeness. Polite society had lost the crucial idea of politeness, the reciprocal pleasing, and so they are like savages who are ‘without courteousness, which has been well called artificial benevolence, as its tendency is to make every one happier to whom it is shown.’ According the essay, the ‘cold indifference’ had substituted the art of pleasing and so ‘our fine people have actually studied themselves back into barbarism, the modern very fine life is an absolute extinction of all good breeding. There is what the French call a *nonchalance*.’ The pursuit of coolness and nonchalance had made sociability lifeless and unfriendly; the fashionable people ‘hardly bow or curtesey at meeting; but make their approach as immovable as *Iroquois*.’ The most scandalous was that gallantry between sexes had degenerated to the savage stage when gentlemen did not even accompany ladies to carriage, but ‘allowed [her] to walk away from a drawing room by herself like an Indian *Squaw* from the social circle round a fire of wood, to the next hill or brook.’<sup>681</sup>

On the grand tour in Italy, Boswell found examples of over-civilized barbarity. He wrote to a friend about his disappointment in Turin. The capital of Savoy did not prove to be the site of civility and elegance. ‘There is neither the elegance of taste nor the politeness of manners that I supposed’, Boswell wrote John Johnston from Italy on January 15, 1765, ‘It contains a great many idle men, and a great many abandoned women.’<sup>682</sup> Although Boswell had his secret life, he clearly required certain standards of the public sexual behaviour: ‘Gross gallantry is their occupation,’ he continued in the same letter, ‘they couple without sentiment, like the Beasts of the field, with this difference that the Beasts have some natural affection for their offspring and the People here have none.’<sup>683</sup> He wrote in the journal how he was ashamed at the uncomplicated sexual codes in Turin where manners were ‘so openly debauched that adultery was

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<sup>680</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 120.

<sup>681</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 122-3.

<sup>682</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Grange*, 152.

<sup>683</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence Grange*, 152.

carried on without the least disguise. I asked them, “But why then do you marry?” “Oh, it’s the custom; it perpetuates families.”<sup>684</sup>

The reason why Boswell was so doubtful about this kind of behaviour was not so much its immorality but primarily its rough openness and the lack of refined forms. The stern formality was equally an enemy of polite sociability. The young Boswell wrote to Rousseau about how boring noble Roman society was: ‘I went to *conversazioni* in the palaces of Roman nobles, where there was a great deal of formality and also a certain air of pleasing richness and grandeur. At Rome everything is external. They have scarcely any real society.’<sup>685</sup> We can only guess the reason for the very exceptional outburst of social satire because principally Boswell’s attitude towards fashionable society was fascination, often naive enthusiasm. But what was most important, the crucial point in the critique, was not that the fashionable life would have become too sophisticated, but, on the contrary, that the polite society had ruined the art of pleasing, and the cold indifference had substituted the lively, urbane, and polite sociability. This was, according to Boswell, the core of the developed civilization.

Although Boswell was strongly fascinated by the courtly milieu, and he saw the court as the school of good breeding, he found painful formalism socially destructive. His interpretation came close to Castiglione’s *sprezzatura*, natural dissimulation, the highly polished behaviour which hides its virtuosity and gives an impression of easy nonchalance more than of formal ceremony. Boswell felt at home at Siena where the nobility formed ‘a society of the most amiable sort’.<sup>686</sup> Gaiety, openness and simplicity characterized their existence. Exceptionally, he referred positively to the absence of court when he noticed that because of that state of affairs the Sieneese were ‘independent, equal, and content to be so’.<sup>687</sup> Strangers, both the highest nobility and the people of lower ranks, were received politely but without any pomposity. They greeted a stranger naturally and then ‘an easy conversation immediately ensues. He forgets that he is a stranger, and no longer is one’.<sup>688</sup> ‘Never have I seen so much of what I should call true humanity as at Siena,’<sup>689</sup> Boswell concluded. It should be emphasized that, for Boswell, ‘true humanity’ did not in any case mean informal closeness or personal openness – Boswell was disgusted by both attitudes.<sup>690</sup> Instead his opinion came close to the aristocratic theory of politeness prevailing in the courts of Italian high renaissance and the French salons of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they avoided the rigid formality of the hierarchical forms of the courtly politeness but favoured unaffected and easy behaviour which hid the inner personality behind the discreet conventions.

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<sup>684</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 25-6.

<sup>685</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 8.

<sup>686</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 13.

<sup>687</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 14.

<sup>688</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 14.

<sup>689</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 14.

<sup>690</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 62-3.

Sometimes the young Boswell had a romantic and somewhat archaic yearning for ancient times. Boswell wrote in Corsica about a time when ‘noblemen lived in their country seats, like princes, in hospitable grandeur. They were men of power, and every one of them could bring hundreds of followers into the field. They were then open and affable.’ The modern nobility has a very different character; they keep a strict distance and reserve ‘because nobility is now little else than a name in comparison of what it was in ancient times’.<sup>691</sup> Boswell made two well known voyages to the periphery regions of Europe: as a young man, he made a trip to Corsica inspired by Rousseau, and the other excursion was made with Doctor Johnson to the Scottish Highlands.

A journey to Corsica was exceptionally important because of the influence of Rousseau to whom Boswell had a highly ambiguous relation: Rousseau’s emphasis of feeling and sentiment had a certain impact on Boswell, but he could not share his stern critique of sophisticated forms of civilization. It was typical of Boswell’s accounts of his journeys that he, travelling in peripheral regions, concentrated attention on the marks of highly developed civilization. True he wrote, in strongly Rousseauistic and republican spirit, on the simple and plain people of Corsica, that ‘we may see by their example, what courage and what virtue the love of liberty gives men.’<sup>692</sup> He referred to the ancient Germans described by Tacitus when he wrote how ‘their morals are strict and chaste to an uncommon degree, owing in part to good principles unhurt by luxury.’<sup>693</sup> But after all, Boswell admired much more the social refinement. He remarked with fascination how a certain Signor Barbaggi, whose ‘lady was a genteel woman,’ offered a dinner of twelve courses ‘served on Dresden china, with a desert, different sorts of wine.’ Boswell asked rhetorically, ‘in what country he could shew me greater luxury than I had seen in his house.’ Then he went to Corte where he was ‘very politely received’ and in the Franciscan convent he met Padre Giulio, ‘a man of much address.’<sup>694</sup> Later in the journey, Boswell received ‘many civilities at Corte from Signor Bocciacombe, and from Signor Massessi the Great Chancellor.’ Signor Luigi, the son of the Great Chancellor, was ‘a young gentleman of much vivacity, and natural politeness.’<sup>695</sup> According to Pottle, Boswell who was ‘essentially a Tory, aristocrat, and monarchist, with almost medieval notions of subordination – anything but an egalitarian’ was especially delighted in Corsica, not by its ‘approximation to the state of nature’, but by its ‘unreformed feudalism’.<sup>696</sup>

In the journey to the Highlands, Boswell was always content with ‘all the conveniences of civilized life in the midst of rude mountains.’<sup>697</sup> He met the Deputy Governor of Fort Augustus who ‘with much civility’ conducted the company to his

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<sup>691</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 345.

<sup>692</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 217.

<sup>693</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 217.

<sup>694</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 280-1.

<sup>695</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 283.

<sup>696</sup> Pottle 1966, 182.

<sup>697</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 147.

house, where they were introduced to the Governor's daughter and her husband who 'were all most obliging and polite.'<sup>698</sup> At Rafay, the travellers found a 'truly polite reception,' and the laird of Rafay proved to be a 'sensible, polite, and most hospitable gentleman.' Lord Errol, 'the representative of the ancient Boyds of Kilmarnock,' in whose person the aristocratic man of fashion and civility appeared in the disguise of an "old Scots baron," was 'agreeable of manners and softness of address.' Lady Errol 'received us politely, and was very attentive to us during the dinner,' and Mr. Boyd, the brother of the Lord who had spent many years in France 'entertained us with great civility. He had a pompousness or formal plenitude in his conversation, which I did not dislike.'<sup>699</sup> The terms 'pompousness' and 'formal plenitude' manifested Boswell's fascination with courtly ceremony.

The noble host was not represented as an archaic feudal lord, rounded by tenants and neighbours, devoted to the primitive pleasures, but as a cultivated man of fashion with 'agreeable manners and softness of address.' Lord Errol's Scottish residence was a drawing room of the London high society moved to the Highlands. Boswell came to the conclusion that he was 'exceedingly pleased with Lord Errol. His dignified person and agreeable countenance, with the most unaffected affability, gave me high satisfaction. From perhaps a weakness, or, as I rather hope, more *fancy and warmth of feeling* than is quite reasonable, my mind is ever impressed with *admiration for persons of high birth*.'<sup>700</sup> The remark expressed two main components of Boswell's social experience: a strong identification with the highest aristocracy and its culture of politeness on the one hand, and an immediate, emotional, and imaginative way of reflecting on people and social occasions in the other.

### *'A calm mastery of myself'*

At the centre of Boswell's reflections on civilization was the demand of self-control and self-cultivation; to reach the civilized state of existence required a meticulous discipline of animal needs, both on the individual and, historically, on the collective level. London was the localization of his own civilizing process. 'O London! London! there let me be; there let me see my friends; there a fair chance is given for pleasing and being pleased,'<sup>701</sup> Boswell wrote to his friend Bennett Langton on July 24, 1793. The spaces of the metropolis were the scenes of the variety of external objects, people, lifestyles and values; the polyphonic reality without any given coordinates and hierarchies. However, the variety of the metropolitan life required a calculated attitude towards it. Boswell saw

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<sup>698</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 147.

<sup>699</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 101-2.

<sup>700</sup> Boswell, *Hebrides*, 108 (it. MK).

<sup>701</sup> Boswell, *Letters*, Vol. II, 449.

that the multiple and chaotic character of the city required a certain attitude towards the self of a city dweller: calculation of bodily gestures, speech and appearance – in short, fashioning of the polite self.

After moving to London, Boswell tried to perform a kind of metamorphosis. He developed a detailed programme of self-fashioning whose aim was to polish off the provincial rudeness and to produce a perfect London man of fashion. Autobiographical writing was the central medium in this process; Boswell's journal can be seen both as a record of the project of self-fashioning and as its medium. The final aim was to produce a cool, distant, opaque but easily behaving metropolitan figure. When leaving London for Utrecht he wrote to Sir David Dalrymple on June 25, 1763:

My great object is to attain a proper conduct in life. How sad will it be, if I turn no better than I am; I have much vivacity, which leads me to dissipation and folly. This, I think, I can restrain. But I will be moderate, and not aim at a stiff sageness and buckram correctness. I must, however, own to you, that I have at bottom a melancholy; which dissipation relieves relieves by making me thoughtless, and therefore, an easier, tho' a more contemptible animal. I dread a return of this malady. ... Pray tell me if Utrecht be a place of a dull and severe cast, or if it be a place of decency and chearfull politeness?<sup>702</sup>

Boswell had very ambivalent relation to the sensible and fanciful facet of his personality: on the one hand, it was the manifestation of his unique and ingenious character, but on the other hand, this feature led him to 'dissipation and folly.' He sought a solution in stoic serenity, the stern control of emotion and whimsies, but obviously he realized that the task was difficult, if not impossible, and sometimes the tone of the remarks was desperate: 'What I want to do is to bring myself to that equality of behaviour, that whether my spirits are high or low, people may see little odds upon me,' he wrote to John Johnston on June 30, 1763, 'I am perswaded that when I can restrain my flightiness and keep an even external tenor, that my mind will attain a settled serenity.'<sup>703</sup> Boswell's famous "Inviolable plan", written in 1763, had an austere, Stoic and Protestant tone; it shot through with a strong sense of duty and a consciousness of his position as a future inheritor of the family estate Auchinleck.

When moved to London as a young man in 1762, Boswell was deeply conscious that he did not possess the proper metropolitan character. He had a highly ambiguous relation to his Scottish background and this was particularly obvious in his reflections on politeness. In short, he identified Scottishness with frankness, vulgarity, and a lack of sophisticated sociability. London was, for him, a kind of counter reality; it represented wit, elegance, sophistication; it was a place where life was fuller. Boswell wrote to his friend Temple on June 3, 1775 how he had arrived at Edinburgh, met his wife and two

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<sup>702</sup> Boswell, *Letters*, Vol. I, 12.

<sup>703</sup> Boswell, *Letters*, Vol. I, 14-5.

daughters in a cordial mood but: ‘indeed, my worthy priest, it required some philosophy to bear the change from England to Scotland. The displeasing tone, the rude familiarity, the barren conversation of those whom I found here, in comparison with what I had left, really hurt my feelings.’<sup>704</sup> Boswell used exceptionally strong expressions when he met his Edinburgh relative Robert Boswell whose ‘Edinburgh forward vulgarity’ quite disgusted him, as he noted in his journal in 1785.<sup>705</sup>

Boswell’s theory of politeness was emphatically urban, but it drew its central substance from the aristocratic and courtly milieu. In the pamphlet *Reflections on the Late Alarming Bankruptcies in Scotland* (1772) he connected the degradation of manners in Scotland with the lack of court in his native country: ‘In *England* there is a court; in *Ireland* the representation of a court, which nearly answers the same purpose, and in both these countries a distinction of ranks is preserved.’<sup>706</sup> Boswell threw a nostalgic glance at the time when Scottish gentlemen were much more polite than those of his own time; they had their jovial clubs of an evening, and they rose from the dinner time enough to pay their compliments to the ladies in the drawing room.<sup>707</sup> According to the writer, many literary documents showed that ‘there was in Scotland a genteel mode of society, which seems now to be quite given up. Our ladies and gentlemen assembled at tea in the afternoons, where they had the most agreeable opportunities of improving themselves in a genteel address and gay conversation.’<sup>708</sup>

A striking symptom of the decline of manners caused by the lack of the court was the excessive use of alcohol among gentlemen, and ‘their being inflamed with liquor must make their conversation and behaviour such, as ought to shock our ladies; and, if they are much accustomed to it, sure I am the enamel is off their minds, and blunted are those finer feelings of which of which an elegant woman ought to be possessed.’ Roughness of manners and a general disposition to heavy drinking had a highly serious consequence: the natural sense of the distinction of hereditary rank had weakened.

From the very nature of things, the genuine distinction which good birth commands cannot be the subject of commerce; therefore the low-born enjoy it not, as it can never be acquired; but, like the compliant drunken companion, who said to his friend who had fallen upon the ground, “I cannot help you up, but I’ll lie down beside you,” our people of birth bring themselves to a level with a mean; so that when the genuine honours due to the birth are destroyed, gold may then purchase every thing that remains.<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Boswell, *Letters Temple*, 160.

<sup>705</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 304.

<sup>706</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 8–9.

<sup>707</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 12.

<sup>708</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 12–13.

<sup>709</sup> Boswell, *Bankruptcies*, 8–9.



Boswell had a strong sense of his ‘roughness’ when he moved to London, and this point of departure was characterized naturalistically in the journal ‘I threw myself loose as a heedless, dissipated, rattling fellow who might say or do every ridiculous thing. ...I found myself a very inferior being.’<sup>710</sup> A comical sketch illustrated the process of metamorphosis in its initial phase: the visit of the Scottish fellow countrymen was wrongly timed: ‘To tell the plain truth, I was vexed at their coming. For to see just the plain *hamely* Fife family hurt my grand ideas of London. Besides, I was now upon a plan of studying polite reserved behaviour, which is the only way keep up dignity of character.’<sup>711</sup> The provincial visitors were incompetent to understand the nature of the project. ‘Had they not come for a twelvemonth, I should have been somewhat established in my address, but as I had been but a fortnight from them,’ he wrote in the diary, and continued that he could not ‘without the appearance of strong affectation’ appear very different from what the Scottish friends had known him in Edinburgh. The result was not encouraging: ‘I accordingly was very free, but rather more silent, which they imputed to my dullness, and roasted me about London’s not being agreeable to me.’<sup>712</sup>

The uncultivated newcomer had to be transformed to the metropolitan gentleman whose appearance included the hiding of inner feelings, a polished and easy conduct, a brilliant public show. ‘Mr. Addison’s character in sentiment, mixed with a little gaiety of Sir Richard Steele and the manners of Mr. Digges, were the ideas which I aimed to realize,’ Boswell characterized the ideal composition of a gentleman in the *London Journal*.<sup>713</sup> London was, for Boswell, as well as a source of spectacular pleasure produced by external objects, also a seat of a civilized and polite way of life. To become a Londoner demanded calculated outward behaviour:

Since I came up, I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I was now happy to find myself cool, easy, and serene.<sup>714</sup>

The quotation has two components. First, opaqueness of the appearance: there was no question of the representation of authentic feelings but the emphasis was on outward politeness – on a polished facade. Secondly, this public figure was malleable. Manners of speech and gestures of the body were raw material from which proper habits should

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<sup>710</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 61-2.

<sup>711</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 61.

<sup>712</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 63.

<sup>713</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 62; see also *The General Correspondence of James Boswell, 1757–1763* (ed. David Hankins and James J. Caudle). Edinburgh, New Haven and London, 2006, 11 (to West Digges after 20 August 1759 and before 16 February 1760).

<sup>714</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 47.

have been moulded. According to Boswell, the polyphonic city demanded fashioning of the self and creating an artificial public figure.

In addition to imagination and sensibility, fashionable life in London required an active attitude towards the self; fashioning of the self that made possible the orientation in the polyphonic world of London.

I resolved to maintain a calm mastery of myself this time in London, and not to grow giddy in it as usual. ... I resolved to take London as one takes mercury; to intermit the use of it whenever should feel it affects my brain, as one intermits the use of mercury when it affects the mouth. I was struck with agreeable wonder and admiration by contemplating the immensity of the metropolis and the multitude of objects; above all, by the number and variety of people.<sup>715</sup>

The excitement produced by the variety of impulses could be governed by 'a calm mastery of myself'. This formulation refers not only to a stoic serenity of mind but also to politeness and its role in the metropolitan way of life.

When writing on the preconditions of sociability, Boswell always stressed the importance of reserve, anonymity and theatricality; according to him, frankness destroyed pleasant sociability. 'Indeed, I must say that Digges has more or as much of the deportment of a man of fashion as anybody I ever saw,' he wrote in the *London Journal* and continued how Digges 'keeps up this so well that he never once lessened upon me even on an intimate acquaintance and I never came to familiarity, which is justly said to beget contempt. The great art of living easy and happy in society is to study proper behaviour, and even with our most intimate friends to observe politeness.'<sup>716</sup> Social masks created distances necessary for working sociability. The inner self was something which had to be kept closed. 'Such is the weakness and imperfection of human nature', Boswell wrote in the essay *On Reserve* (1779), 'that it will not bear to be too closely examined in any character; and therefore he who lays himself quite open will infallibly be lessened in the estimation of all around him.'<sup>717</sup> And the demand was reciprocal: he alluded to Swift's way of describing the nausea caused by the close inspection of human being's corporal qualities when he wrote in the essay *On Censure* (1779) that 'in the same manner we ought to conduct ourselves as to mental qualities; and not be always examining nicely into the characters of our neighbours.'<sup>718</sup>

The sentimental writer William Shenstone wrote an essay *On Reserve* which has both similarities and differences with Boswell's view. In accordance with Boswell, Shenstone wrote that 'there is not [says a friend] any one quality so inconsistent with respect, as what is commonly called familiarity. You do not find one in fifty, whose

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<sup>715</sup> Boswell, *Extremes*, 22.

<sup>716</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 62–3.

<sup>717</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 140.

<sup>718</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 148.

regard is proof against it.<sup>719</sup> Because of the low social standards of most people, the friend continues, ‘Were it not better, therefore, to be somewhat frugal of our affability, at least to allot it only to the few persons of discernment who can make the proper distinction betwixt real dignity and pretended’.<sup>720</sup> For Shenstone, the real value of human communication is strictly connected with truthfulness; he lamented that ‘Virtue and agreeableness are, I fear, too often separated; that is, externals affect and captivated the fancy, where the internal worth is wanting, to engage and attach one’s reason – A most perplexing circumstance; and no where more remarkable, than when we see a wise man totally enslaved by the beauty of a person he despises.’<sup>721</sup> According to Shenstone, there ‘would not be any absolute necessity for reserve if the world were honest’.<sup>722</sup> On the other hand, he adds that ‘in order to attain any degree of deference, it seems necessary that people should imagine you have more accomplishments than you discover.’<sup>723</sup> In every case, fundamentally the reserve in social occasions is strictly connected with sheltering one’s authentic self from false friendship, and so a man has to be extremely careful in his social contacts: ‘Prudent men lock up their motives; letting familiars have a key to their heart, as to their garden’.<sup>724</sup> The distinction between suspicious “others” and honest “familiars” was a diametrical opposite to the cosmopolitan conception of friendship: in the sentimental context, the reserve was a consequence of the cult of authenticity, not, as for Boswell, a part of aesthetic self-fashioning.

‘I must really learn a little of that restraint which foreigners call politeness, and which after a certain time becomes quite easy,’<sup>725</sup> Boswell remarked in Germany in 1764. According to him, the principle of reciprocal pleasing required distance, respect for other person’s privacy; familiarity was a mechanism which produced uncivilized behaviour and destroyed urbane sociability. Reserved dignity was an attitude which made possible pleasant life with other people; it was not question of rigidity towards oneself or fellow creatures but, on the contrary, pursuit of good life, the pleasure produced by easy sociability. The aim of self-discipline was an opaque and polished but socially spontaneous and flexible character. This kind of person was ‘gay without levity, and judicious without severity,’<sup>726</sup> the young Boswell wrote in his account of Corsica. ‘Seeing people at Court is a trial of their disposition,’ the aged Boswell wrote down in March 1786, and he was content with his behaviour in this highly demanding place to be seen: ‘Went to the drawing-room at St. James’s. Was perfectly independent and easy. A great many people here. The King only asked me about the weather, and I

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<sup>719</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 24.

<sup>720</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 24-5.

<sup>721</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 151.

<sup>722</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 25.

<sup>723</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 25.

<sup>724</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 28.

<sup>725</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 38.

<sup>726</sup> Boswell, *Corsica*, 393.

walked and moved about, or some such nothing'.<sup>727</sup> The outer appearance had priority over the inner self; the facade did not reflect the qualities of the inner self but fashioning of the outer behaviour produced effects in the inner reality. The body and the mind were material of which the techniques of the self produced the civilized person. This artificial self made possible, not only participation in polite sociability, but also theatrical expression on the stages of public life.

### *Ambiguous Flattery*

One of the most controversial features of the art of pleasing was flattery; pleasing based on a lie or half truth. In the courtly tradition, which emphasized theatrical appearance and accepted dissimulation, the attitude was quite pragmatic: flattery was a part of the reciprocal care of the social facade. Sir Francis Osborne, for instance, emphasized the positive role of flattery in gentlemanly sociability. Lord Chesterfield warned of 'criminal flattery', which meant flattering or encouraging somebody's vices or crimes. But in other cases, Chesterfield was a thorough representative of the courtly code. Effective flattering required, of course, the identification of fellow creature's strengths, but, much more importantly, the points of vanity. In a letter to his son he gave an excellent example of his disillusioned view of the nature of man: 'If you would particularly gain the affection and friendship of particular people, whether men or women, endeavour to find out their predominant excellency, if they have one, and their prevailing weakness, which everybody has; and do justice to the one, and something more than justice to the other.'<sup>728</sup> Here we can recognize a difference between Boswell and Chesterfield: when Boswell saw the respect for other person's integrity as reciprocal – 'not be always examining nicely into the characters of our neighbours' – Chesterfield emphasized that, while you mask your own personal features, you have to examine carefully other people's character. He continued:

Men have various objects in which they may excel...and though they love to hear justice done to them, where they know that they excel, yet they are most and best flattered upon those points where they wish to excel, and yet are doubtful whether they do or not. As for example: Cardinal Richelieu, who was undoubtedly the ablest statesman of his time, ...had the idle vanity of being thought the best poet too...Those, therefore, who flattered skilfully, said little to him of his abilities in state affairs, or at least but *en passant* ...But the incense which they gave him – the smoke of which they knew would turn his head in their favour – was a *bel esprit* and a poet. Why? – Because he was sure of one excellency, and distrustful as to the other.<sup>729</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> Boswell, *English Experiment*, 46.

<sup>728</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1037.

<sup>729</sup> Chesterfield, *Letters* III, 1037.

The code introduced by Locke, Addison and Steele – and also Dr Johnson had similar opinions – was not equally tolerant: the real gentleman never resorted to dissimulation and lying. ‘Among all the Diseases of Mind there is not one more epidemical or more pernicious than the Love of Flattery’, began Richard Steele his essay on the topic in *The Spectator*. When quoting a poem by Edmund Waller he compared flattery with music: ‘So softens and disarms the mind/That not one Arrow can Resistance find.’ Softening of the mind referred both to the feminizing effect of an over-sophisticated culture of politeness and to the role of flattery in courtly politeness. Flattery was an integral part of the courtly milieu and its unequal network of dependencies, so flattery was a threat to political freedom and it could not belong to the sociability of the free men:

First we flatter our selves, and the Flattery of others is sure of Success. It awakens our Self-Love within, a Party which is ever ready to revolt from our better judgement, and joyn the Enemy without. ... When we are overcome by such soft Insinuations and ensnaring Compliances, we gladly recompence the Artifices that are made Use to blind our Reason, and which triumph over the Weaknesses of our Temper and Inclinations.<sup>730</sup>

Reason and independent judgment were central values in the Augustan Whig-spirited cultural milieu, and flattery with all its consequences was contradictory to them. Then Steele introduced the second central topic concerning flattery: effeminacy. According to the eighteenth-century social satire, over-civilized manners, flattery among them, had a deteriorating impact on manliness and martial virtues. Beau, coxcomb and fop were the terms characterizing the caricature of man who had in fashionable society lost his central manly features and adopted feminine manners. ‘When there is not Vanity enough awake in a Man to undo him, the Flatterer stirs up that dormant Weakness, and inspires him with Merit enough to be a Coxcomb,’<sup>731</sup> Steele wrote in *The Spectator*. In another essay he lamented how ‘the world is grown so full of Dissimulation and Compliment’ and ‘the old *English* Plainness and Sincerity, that generous Integrity of Nature, and Honesty of Disposition, which always argues true Greatness of Mind ... is in a great measure lost among us’<sup>732</sup>. Fundamentally flattery was in irreconcilable conflict with the idea of politeness based on inward civility, a conception which required honesty and sincerity in social occasions as well as correspondence between words and thoughts.

Dr Johnson saw that the art of pleasing flourished there where it was rewarded, namely in the societies under absolute government, because in an unequal society

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<sup>730</sup> *The Spectator* II, 424.

<sup>731</sup> *The Spectator* II, 425.

<sup>732</sup> *The Spectator* I, 430.

politeness was the means to better one's position in the hierarchy.<sup>733</sup> According to him, this was a natural phenomenon but in some cases it generated problems if someone had a weak character: 'He that is too desirous to be loved, will soon learn to flatter, and when he has exhausted all the variations of honest praise, and can delight no longer with the civility of truth, he will invent new topics of panegyric, and break out raptures at virtues and beauties conferred by himself'.<sup>734</sup> Like Steele, Johnson found the justifiable praise as a classical virtue, but in consequence of the weakness of human nature, the danger of lapsing into flattery was always acute. His conclusion was resigned: 'None can be pleased without praise, and few can be praised without falsehood; few can be assiduous without servility, and none can be servile without corruption'.<sup>735</sup> We will see that Johnson's biographer had quite a different perspective to this problem.

In 1782, Boswell wrote a slightly ironical essay *On Flattery*. The motto by Athenaeus – 'The title of Parasite was anciently respectable and sacred'<sup>736</sup> – was highly informative. He avoided all the moral distinctions and examined the phenomenon as an integral component of human sociability which could appear in various disguises. Boswell quoted Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: "When I tell him he hates flatterers "He says he does, being then most flattered."<sup>737</sup> Boswell connected the forms of flattery with the level of development of a society: 'in proportion as human nature is artless or gross, the more direct should Flattery be to have its influence. A child must be flattered in the plainest terms: so must a savage.'<sup>738</sup> They would not be capable to understand sophisticated compliments. Anyway, flattery had existed in human communication from the distant past and it had appeared in different forms in different times. Boswell referred to ancient sages when he wrote that 'in pagan imagination, something whimsically mysterious supposed in the character of one, who while he shared in the feast, cheered and elevated all around him, by raising in their minds agreeable and lofty notions of themselves'.<sup>739</sup> This epitomized the core of Boswell's theory of flattery: regardless of its outer forms the function of the flattery had through the ages been to raise the mood of fellow beings and give a positive impression of themselves – and of the flatterer, too.

Boswell agreed with Lord Chesterfield when condemning the criminal flattery which was based on pure falsehood, but he made a reservation:

There may be honest as well as dishonest Flattery. There may be Flattery from a sincere admiration and a *desire to please*. It is benevolent to indulge this; and a man of good disposition may find frequent opportunities for it, by

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<sup>733</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 190–1.

<sup>734</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 192.

<sup>735</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler* II, 194.

<sup>736</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 197.

<sup>737</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 301.

<sup>738</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 300.

<sup>739</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 298.

directly or obliquely bringing under the view of those with whom he associates, such circumstances in their situations and characters as are agreeable.<sup>740</sup>

The flattery in highly civilized societies appeared in such subtle forms which, like Castiglione's *sprezzatura*, required deciphering; here the flatterer had a selective audience which did not accept direct and frank expression. On the contrary, 'people, whose taste is refined, must have the sweet and soothing potion of Flattery administered with gentle hand, that they may sip it as it were imperceptibly, and enjoy the essence without feeling the coarseness of any vehicle'.<sup>741</sup> But the most effective form of flattery was second hand flattery, because direct flattery '... may be repelled; but Flattery oblique is sure to penetrate. One is not prepared it; and it darts into heart.'<sup>742</sup>

It is easy to recognize some crucial differences between the foundations of Steele's and Boswell's opinions. For Steele (as for Locke and Addison), flattery was a moral and political problem; it was a threat to honest and sincere sociability but, above all, it had a deteriorating impact on political and personal freedom because it created corrupting dependencies between people. Dr Johnson followed quite similar logic. According to Lord Chesterfield, flattery was a necessary element of civilized sociability but it had also a remarkable instrumental value in the intrigues of fashionable society. Boswell accepted flattery with nearly same reservations as Chesterfield, but, for him, flattery did not have instrumental function but it intensified the pleasure produced by polite sociability; it added an element of illusion and creativity to social occasions. Flattery was a part of the aesthetics of existence like politeness on the whole.

## *Double Feeling*

According to Boswell, London required an experimental attitude towards the self and he tested the different versions of his self towards the multiplicity of the metropolis. 'I make game of society in this transitory life, and of all its varieties, serious and comic. I frisk with women and with men, too,'<sup>743</sup> Boswell noted in 1784. Theatrical positions were the source of intense pleasure for Boswell from his earliest years. In an early letter to Lord Eglinton on September 25, 1761 he wrote how, according to *The Spectator*, 'men generally are fonder to appear happy, than to be really so', and he continued how he was 'playing the sphinx', and endeavouring to perplex the Earl's mind by a 'dark and inconceivable enigma.'<sup>744</sup> Sometimes Boswell seemed to think that life had also a

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<sup>740</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 301–2 (it. MK).

<sup>741</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 300.

<sup>742</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 300.

<sup>743</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 207.

<sup>744</sup> Boswell, *Correspondence, 1757—1763*, 104-5.



deeper theatrical dimension; as a disillusioned middle-aged man he wrote in 1783 that 'my mind was now in such an indifferent frame that *I looked on all human concerns as scenes of drama*, and it did not seriously affect me.'<sup>745</sup>

Life as a theatre is an age-old metaphor, but here it can be seen as a manifestation of the aesthetic conception of the world. The series of essays *On the Profession of a Player* (1770) dealt with the nature of playing, but it widened to reflecting the basic conditions of the social life. According to Boswell's aestheticism, a polite self included a creative, theatrical dimension. For him, politeness was not only the reserved and polished exterior hiding the inner impulses, but the social interaction on the whole was a theatrical play with roles, and this attitude made possible the artistic creativity on the stage of social life. The fascination of theatricality and dissimulation was in accordance with Boswell's education. Peter Martin writes how a part of the young Boswell's 'adolescent peripety of this period was his passion for chameleon-like role-playing. He sought out models he wanted to emulate, then imagined himself as them.'<sup>746</sup>

At first Boswell asked 'what is the nature of that peculiar faculty which makes one of a good player?'<sup>747</sup> He used the term 'double feeling' to depict the identification of the player: 'The feelings and passions of the character which he represents must take full possession as it were of the antechamber of his mind, while his own character remains in the innermost recess.' He compared a player to a barrister who identifies himself with a case of his guilty client. Similarly politeness required a 'double feeling': 'Were nothing but the real character to appear, society would not be half so safe and agreeable we find it'. Theatrical attitude towards social intercourse brought a dimension of play and artistic creativity to human encounters. The development of the respect for the player's profession has reflected the general progress of civilization. In ancient times, playing 'was appropriated to slaves or to the meanest of the people. That the profession was odious, there is no wonder.'<sup>748</sup> In Christian times, the situation changed but not necessarily to a better direction, because then theatre was seen as a relic of heathen idolatry. Later, although religious attitudes had eased, playing was seen problematic still because 'the human mind continued its aversion to them, as a man, who has been tossed at sea, feels himself agitated long after he is upon land.'<sup>749</sup>

Here Boswell referred to the attitude which Jonas Barish calls anti-theatrical prejudice.<sup>750</sup> In the West, the history of this view stems from both classical antiquity and the Christian tradition. According to Plutarch, Solon called Thespis a liar because he was pretending to be someone else. Plato's hesitation towards theatrical illusion and poetical ambiguity is generally known, and in spite of strong theatrical culture, classical

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<sup>745</sup> Boswell, *Applause*, 72.

<sup>746</sup> Martin 1999, 57.

<sup>747</sup> James Boswell, *On the Profession of a Player: Three Essays by James Boswell*. London, 1929, 11.

<sup>748</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 2.

<sup>749</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 2-3.

<sup>750</sup> See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1981.

world was ambivalent concerning playing. One of the strongest figures in the western anti theatrical discourse was without doubt Saint Augustine. Whereas Plato saw artistic illusion as a threat to healthy social order, the great Father of the Church connected playing with idolatry, and he condemned theatre because it made possible misleading and mocking. He agreed with Plato who expelled poets from his republic: ‘Compare, now, the humanity of Plato, who banished poets from the city so that the citizens should not be deceived, with the divinity of those gods who demanded theatrical performances in their own honour.’<sup>751</sup> The central point in Saint Augustine and other Fathers of the Church was that the human being had no permission to fashion his person on his own authority; he is the creation of God and so the human interference can only be disastrous. Tertullian formulated the principle that ‘Whatever is *born* is the work of God. Whatever ... is plastered on, is the devil’s work’.<sup>752</sup>

The Augustinian anti-theatrical tradition continued in many forms and, in Britain, came to the fore in Puritan attitudes towards theatrical performances. The point of departure was the critique of the popish mass which had turned a simple communal occasion into a mendacious spectacle.<sup>753</sup> The Jesuits’s habit to use theatrical performances for religious purposes strengthened the anti-theatrical ethos among the English and Scottish Protestants. In this context the anti-theatrical attitude was connected either with republican political ethos, with certain religious – mostly Dissenter – viewpoints, or with the sentimental cult of sincerity and authenticity. Boswell saw the issue very differently. Civilization had progressed and ‘the present age beholds the profession of a player in a proper light, and treats it accordingly. We now see that it ought to be ranked amongst the learned professions: for the truth is, that in order to be a good player, there is required a greater share of genius, knowledge, and accomplishment, than for any one profession whatever; for this reason, that *the profession of a player comprehends the whole system of human life. – quicquid agunt homines.*’<sup>754</sup> The realm of theatricality was not confined to the stage but social life itself was a stage; in a civilized society, social intercourse was based on masks and changeable roles, and just this feature made possible varied and sophisticated sociability.

The highly popular moralistic pamphlets on the vices of London formed a kind of counter-picture to Boswell’s views. The pamphlet *The London Unmask’d* is a paradigmatic example of the genre. The author observed urban phenomena through a kind of microscope; during his tour he ‘will look with an observant eye before, behind, and around him, nor pass, if possible, the minuteist subject that appears, worthy of

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<sup>751</sup> Augustinus Aurelius, *The City of God and Against the Pagans* (ed. R. W. Dyson). Cambridge, 1998, 66.

<sup>752</sup> Tertullian, *Writings* I, 321 (cit. Barish 1981, 158).

<sup>753</sup> Barish 1981, 159-161.

<sup>754</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 3 (it. MK).

notice'.<sup>755</sup> In his journey through the urban jungle of London he observed myriad vices but there was a capital vice which was seemingly the source of all other vices, namely the forging of one's identity. This could have several modifications: forgery of personal, professional, social or sexual identity.

There cannot be a greater instance of folly, than a desire of appearing in disguise... In a great measure by the unthinking part of the world's judging according to the old proverb. "Fine feathers make fine birds;" and persons are generally respected, where they are not personally known, according to the exterior appearance; from a rebundance of superfluous ornaments shallow judges estimate property; as little wits do understanding from a multiplicity of words; hence frequently, if there is any superficial knowledge of the world acquired by observation, and a consciousness of little or no intrinsic merit, an appearance above rank and circumstance is assumed, especially in large and populous places, where obscure characters may pass from spot to spot a long time unknown and excite the esteem of the million, not for what they are, but what they seem to be.<sup>756</sup>

A very typical example of the growing anti-theatricality in the eighteenth-century was a figure of "false friend". This character appeared especially in pamphlets where outsiders were advised to cope with the urban jungle of London which, according to Richard King's *The New Cheats of London* (1780), 'may justly be compared to a large forest of wild beasts, where thousands range about a venture, are equally savage, and mutually destructive one of another.'<sup>757</sup> Besides being a dangerous place, London was a scene where nothing was as it seemed to be. So the crucial idea was that it was necessary to see through the masks to the real character and real motives. According to the pamphleteer, the pretended friends have to be compared with murderers because 'they are guilty of violating every sacred tie, that can connect the interest of mankind, or promote social happiness.'<sup>758</sup> This implied that social happiness was connected with sincerity and authenticity, not with theatrical play with masks. True friendship required openness of the soul and reciprocal familiarity; clearly these pamphlets explicate a sentimental conception of friendship which was not unproblematic in the anonymous metropolis.

The author of *The Honest London Spy* (1779) maintained that friendship was a special kind of social bond because it 'is a mutual obligation between two or more persons, to assist each other in any emergence that may happen.'<sup>759</sup> The relation was very close and binding:

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<sup>755</sup> *London Unmask'd*, v.

<sup>756</sup> *London Unmask'd* 42-3.

<sup>757</sup> Richard King, Esq., *The new cheats of London exposed; or, the frauds and tricks of the town laid open to both sexes*. London, 1780, 62.

<sup>758</sup> King, *New Cheats*, 60.

<sup>759</sup> *The honest London spy: exhibiting the base and subtle intrigues of the town, in a number of essays, serious and comical* (by Peeping Tim). Galway, 1779, 3.

We should first know the person thoroughly, before we engage in so strict and sacred a bond with him. Conversation will shew us both the virtues and vices of our acquaintance, and how far they are agreeable to us in their inclinations: We ought especially to note the principles, designs, and pleasures of those with whom we contract amity; for if either of those are opposite to our own, there can be no possibility of a true and lasting affection.<sup>760</sup>

Because friendship was based on authenticity and the communion of the souls, the stakes were high because the openness meant disarmedness. This demanded the art of decoding and extreme caution because you could never be sure whether the outer expressions of friendship were authentic. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the cult of authenticity was the main anti-theatrical force, and it was a current which Boswell set up to oppose.

Here it is illustrating to remember what Boswell wrote about his friendship with West Digges: ‘Indeed, I must say that Digges has more or as much of the deportment of a man of fashion as anybody I ever saw; and he keeps up this so well that he never once lessened upon me even on an intimate acquaintance.’ Even friendship did not exist outside of the culture of politeness; only formal codes made possible the enjoyment of company of a friend because masks sheltered from hurts and intrusion. For Boswell, artificial roles made it possible to introduce a dimension of creativity to the occasions of human encounter. Theatrical playing was a school for developed social and emotional life: ‘But not only are learning and science necessary for an universal player; he must also have all the genteel accomplishments — he must be an *elegans formarum spectator* — he must have elevation and tenderness of sentiment, dignity and ease of deportment — he must even have a knowledge of the weaknesses, the follies, the awkwardness, and rusticity of human life.’<sup>761</sup> In short, Boswell saw the theatre as a metaphor of human life in general; the artificial aspect of the human communication was an essential part of social life.

Boswell saw social playing as a fundamental feature of a developed civilization, but before going to the wider cultural issues, Boswell asked, what was like the special mechanism of the player’s identification.

But the player “*lives o’er each scene*”, and, in certain sense “*is what we behold;*” and this constitutes the mysterious difficulty of being a good player: for by what power is it that a man is able at a certain hour to change himself into a different kind of being from what he really is? How is it that a man, perfectly easy and happy can make himself wretched and sorrowful without

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<sup>760</sup> *The Honest London Spy*, 5.

<sup>761</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 7—8.

the intervention of any cause whatever, but a voluntary operation of his own mind?<sup>762</sup>

Boswell introduced the double feeling to depict the identification of a player. He compared this attitude the one of a barrister who knows that his client is guilty but who anyway uses all his professional skills in defending his client.<sup>763</sup> But the identification was not total because ‘a player is the character he represents only *in a certain degree*; and therefore there is a distinction between his being what I have said, and his being the character he represents in the full sense of the expression.’<sup>764</sup> Boswell represented the distinction in his youthful journal. He wrote about a discussion between his companions Captain Maud and Frances Sheridan on the nature of theatrical action. Captain Maud had assued that ‘an actor ought to forget himself and the audience entirely, and be quite the real character; and that for his part, he was so much so that he remembered nothing at all but the character. This Mr. Maud opposed as wrong; because an actor in that case would not play so well, as he would not be enough master of himself. I think he was right.’<sup>765</sup> As in playing, in the social intercourse in general, people had to keep in mind the double structure of the communicative or theatrical situation: the double feeling required double consciousness, a bipartite way of fashion of our behaviour both on the stage and in the social life.

Boswell extended his perspective to concern the social intercourse in general. The double feeling was an integral part of civilized sociability and it prevented us to degenerate into barbarians. ‘Were nothing but the real character to appear, society would not be half so safe and agreeable as we find it,’ he argued provocatively. ‘Did we discover to our companions what we really think of them, frequent quarrels would ensue; and did we not express more regard for them than we really feel, the pleasure of social intercourse would be very contracted.’ Dissimulation, according to Boswell, was a crucial component of sociability; instead of being a mark of moral decay, it a necessary component of civilized behaviour: ‘It being necessary then in the intercourse of life to have such appearances, and dissimulation being to most people irksome and fatiguing, we insensibly, our own ease, adopt feelings suitable to every occasion, and so, like players, are to a certain degree a different character from our own.’<sup>766</sup> For Boswell, artificiality, not authenticity and sincerity, made possible the spontaneous and creative attitude towards social occasions.

In 1764, Boswell wrote about Voltaire who had received him ‘with dignity’ and in the ‘air of the world which a Frenchman acquires in such perfection’.<sup>767</sup> In the issues of manners, Boswell was always a Francophile, and it is highly interesting, in the context

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<sup>762</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 12.

<sup>763</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 18.

<sup>764</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 16.

<sup>765</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 109.

<sup>766</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 19.

<sup>767</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 272.

of eighteenth-century cultural debates, how he made comparisons between British and French cultures according to the theatrical aspect of sociability. Xenophobic comparison between British and French manners and morals was a strong trend in the eighteenth century British cultural debates. Very typical was William Shenstone's comment on French politeness:

The superior politeness of the French is in nothing more discernible than in the phrases used by them and us to express affair being in agitation. The former says, "sur la tapis;" the latter "upon the anvil." Does it not shew also the sincerity and serious face with which we enter upon business, and the negligent and jaunty air which they perform even the most important?<sup>768</sup>

Boswell dealt with the topic from very different point of view in *The London Journal*:

We talked of French manners, and how they studied to make one another happy. "The English," said I, "accuse them of being false, because they misunderstand them. When a Frenchman makes warm professions of regard, he does it only to please you for the time. It is words of course. There is no more of it. But the English, who are cold and phlegmatic in their address, take all these fine speeches in earnest, and are confounded to find the otherwise, and exclaim against the perfidious Gaul most unjustly."<sup>769</sup>

Because of the developed theatrical aspect in their culture, the French are happy and pleasant, and madness and suicide were totally unknown to them. And "the heat of fancy evaporates in fine brisk clear vapour with them, but amongst the English falls heavy upon the brain"<sup>770</sup>

Boswell continued this comparison in his essays on the profession of a player. It was very distinctive that he found the playing with artificial selves as a particular strength of the French sociability; the French were happier and more polite *because* of their theatrical roles. Falseness and dissimulation, the cardinal vices of the archenemy proved to be their essential advantage.

And it must be observed, that the greater degree a man is accustomed to assume of artificial feeling, the more probability is there that he has no character of his own on which we can depend, unless indeed he been born of an uncommon degree of firmness: hence it is that the French, who are celebrated as the politest people in Europe, and in conformity with the ideas which I have just now mentioned, may be considered as perpetual comedians, have the least original character, and have been censured as fickle and false: whereas the English, who have a plain bluntness of behaviour, are truly a nation of originals, and are universally allowed to be remarkably honest. But

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<sup>768</sup> Shenstone, *Essays*, 100.

<sup>769</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 88.

<sup>770</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 88.

laying aside natural prejudice, we must confess that the politeness of the French makes them much happier; because from the continual habit of working themselves into an agreeable frame – into complacency and self-satisfaction, they actually enjoy those blessings; and the falseness for which they are censured, is not tainted with malignity; for it is only volatility and changeableness.<sup>771</sup>

The idea of politeness as theatrical self-fashioning connects Boswell's theory of politeness to the dissimulation and *sprezzatura* of the courtly tradition of politeness. The theatrical play with the self was strongly antagonist both to the Augustinian idea of man as the bearer of the original sin, who was not allowed to try to perfect oneself, and to the Augustan humanist conception of the inward civility as the distinctive mark of the gentleman. For Boswell, theatricality also had the dimension of creative imagination and emotional identification which connected courtly politeness to his Romantic self, to the 'man of imagination and feeling'.

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<sup>771</sup> Boswell, *Player*, 20-21.



## V MASQUERADE AND LIBERTINAGE

‘At the bottom of the Haymarket I picked up a strong, jolly young damsel, and taking her under the arm I conducted her to Westminster Bridge, and then in armour complete did I engage her upon this noble edifice. The whim of doing it there with the Thames rolling below us amused me much. Yet after the brutish appetite was sated, I could not but despise myself for being so closely united with such a low wretch,’ the young Boswell remarked in 1763.<sup>772</sup> London was strongly sexualized in Boswell, especially in his *London Journal*. In his imagination, London was a city of pleasure; London offered multiple prospects for amorous adventures.<sup>773</sup> He recorded in his journal a nightly episode: ‘I felt carnal inclinations raging through my frame. I determined to gratify them. I went to St. James’s Park, and, like Sir John Brute, picked up a whore.’<sup>774</sup> The reference to the Restoration comedy was obvious: Sir John Brute was a figure in Sir John Vanbrugh’s play *The Provok’d Wife*. In this literary genre, the principal theme was erotic intrigues in the fashionable London milieu. The allusion closely connects Boswell’s imagination to the seventeenth-century culture of libertinage.

Boswell had spent a night with his mistress Louisa, and the heightened *machismo* aroused a literary allusion in which he identified himself with Restoration London. ‘We awakened from sweet repose after the luscious fatigues of the night. I got up between nine and ten and walked out till Louisa should rise,’ he wrote in his journal in 1763, ‘I patrolled up and down Fleet Street, thinking of London, the seat of Parliament and the seat of pleasure, and seeming to myself as one of the wits in King Charles the Second’s time.’<sup>775</sup> The metropolis, pleasure and history were combined in the remark, and the London milieu was strongly associated with the seventeenth century aristocratic culture. This was not an accident. In Berlin, the young Boswell felt strong when walking in the Tiergarten Park: ‘then away we went and took a hearty walk in the Park, which is a noble thing just by this beautiful city. It has a variety of walks both for coaches and horsemen, as well as those who love the milder movement of their own limbs. We grew as fresh and as strong and as content as men of the last century.’<sup>776</sup> The expression ‘men of the last century’ referred to the aristocratic libertines of the Restoration.

Sexual libertinism was a distinctive feature of the Restoration court aristocracy, the Earl of Rochester as their most prominent representative, but in the Augustan Age

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<sup>772</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 255-6.

<sup>773</sup> See Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650—1850*. London and New York, 1998, 70, 74—5; Weed 1997/1998.

<sup>774</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 227.

<sup>775</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 140.

<sup>776</sup> Boswell, *Germany and Switzerland*, 21.

moral reformists combated persistently against this depravity, and the moral weeklies satirised the licentiousness of the nobility. It became also an object of satirical mockery on the stage.<sup>777</sup> Libertinism as a mode of behaviour did not vanish, of course, the eighteenth-century was a century of the multiform sexual underworlds, but the common sense morality of the British Enlightenment and, in the second half of the century, the sentimental cult of authentic feeling disapproved the open debauchery. ‘The “man of feeling” rejected unsentimental pursuit of pleasure in favor of a more emotional and inward-looking mode of sexuality’ George E. Haggerty writes, and, according to him, the difference between the libertine and the sentimental modes of masculinity ‘is more than a mere reflection of class distinction or the rise of middle-class morality. It hints at a cultural shift that reorders the models for masculinity, rejecting libertine licence in favor of a model of friendship that the classical tradition had already richly articulated.’<sup>778</sup> Max Byrd writes that ‘Boswell’s London follies are not to be confused with national or historic moods; they are purely and merely personal explosions of temperament, detonated by the contact of Londonian ether with his own inflammable personality.’<sup>779</sup> According to Byrd, Boswell’s rakish behaviour often included a strong element of fantasy, an imaginary identification with some fictional or real person: Macheath, “blackguard” or the wits of the seventeenth century. Byrd argues that, on the one hand, Boswell’s delight in these low roles testified his personal frustrations in London as well as his rebellious attitude towards his authoritarian father, but on the other hand, Boswell’s demimondial roles were tied ‘with his self-conscious emotional response to the city: they help to account for our impression that his London is a stage for the discovery and display of personality, and the spur us to speculate that in certain way he thereby represents a new and modern urban man.’<sup>780</sup> Boswell’s position was ambiguous; in spite of his sentimental disposition, he was strongly fascinated by the previous century’s libertine culture. He constructed his gentlemanly ideal mostly of the high aristocratic models.

In this last chapter I will examine Boswell’s attitude towards the “dark” side of the eighteenth-century urban sexuality, and I will argue that although Boswell was not a libertine in the strict sense of the word – he did not share the blasphemous and demonic aspects of the “classical” libertinism – and he was not an aristocrat either, his moral code was closer to the seventeenth-century libertinage than to the rising “bourgeois” code of sexuality. I argue that there was not any conflict between Boswell’s polite identity and his libertine self because the aristocratic interpretation on politeness included both elements. The lack of moral distinctions was the distinctive feature of Boswell’s urban experience, and this was the case also in his attitude towards the

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<sup>777</sup> Jill Campbell, “‘When Men Women Turn’: Gender Reversals in Fielding’s Plays”, in *The New 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (ed. Felicity Nussbaum & Laura Brown). Methuen, New York and London, 1987., 63.

<sup>778</sup> Haggerty 1999, 114-5.

<sup>779</sup> Byrd 1978, 92.

<sup>780</sup> Byrd, 93-7.

licentious sexuality of the London underworld. There are some remarks on the “lowness” of the reckless sexual behaviour in Boswell’s texts, and sometimes he regretted about his infidelity, but on the whole he found the realm of prostitution and debauchery as a normal and necessary element of the metropolitan social geography. The use of masks and the changing of identity were crucial elements in the sphere of libertinage, and I will connect them with Boswell’s general theory of sociability as a kind of theatrical performance.

### *The Labyrinth of Vice*

Labyrinthine opaqueness was the dominating experience of London as a spatial entity in the eighteenth-century reception, and it was a commonplace to see the metropolis more or less as a moral, mental and medical threat. In the seventeenth century, satirists had recognized a special erotized sphere in London geography which was called ‘Erotopolis’ or ‘*London separate from London*’.<sup>781</sup> It was the dark zone of debauchery and illicit pleasures and sensations in which the codes of everyday life were not in force. The critical discourse continued and strengthened during the eighteenth century. Of course, there were notable differences between authors. Satirists and religious writers painted black on black when writing on the myriad vices and follies of the city. Some others, such as Addison, Steele and Dr. Johnson, were more selective: for them, London was a highly fascinating scene of life but it included spheres which had to be avoided.

The contemporary fears had strong localisations. Sir John Fielding wrote about St. James’s Park that it ‘is the usual place of exercise in a morning for fine gentlemen and ladies, who resort thither to see and to be seen.’<sup>782</sup> But walking in the park was not riskless; Fielding repeated advices familiar from several satirical pamphlets: ‘But it behoves them also to be upon their guard. For here too the defining sharper spreads his toils for the weak and unexperienced. Here the delusive courtesan walks silent, and leers upon the passenger, in hopes of being accosted by some thoughtless extravagant.’<sup>783</sup>

Covent Garden was a focus of the imagination of the vicious city. The square had been a respectable residential square in the early seventeenth century but in the next century it was full of demimondial activities. Several writers demanded the renovation of the square, and every city guide included warnings of the district. John Gwynn had an aesthetical point of view; Covent Garden, he wrote, ‘would be rendered one of the

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<sup>781</sup> Turner 2002, 31; see Faramerz Dabhoivala, ‘The pattern of sexual immorality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London,’ in *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (ed. Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner). Manchester and New York, 2000, 86–106.

<sup>782</sup> Sir John Fielding *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*. London, 1776, xxviii.

<sup>783</sup> Fielding, *Enquiry*, xxviii.

most elegant squares in Europe.’ But this requires rebuilding of the Piazzas which are in ‘a ruinous condition.’<sup>784</sup> According to Fielding, Covent Garden ‘is the great square of Venus, and the purlieus are crowded with the votaries of this goddess.’<sup>785</sup> He expressed a very familiar warning to young gentlemen: ‘Every considerate young man, who has the least regard for his health, property, or happiness, will shun these infected haunts, which are the ways of death, and consider them as a burial-places of modesty and honour, of constitution and interest.’<sup>786</sup> The anonymous author of the pamphlet *The Complete Modern London Spy* (1781) was horrified at the myriad vices present in Covent Garden and, after noticing homosexual activities, he and his companion reflected the proper methods to punish ‘this horrible crime’.<sup>787</sup>

The libertinage of the Restoration caused a reaction. The new moralist ethos of the early eighteenth century was a part of attempts to reform urban manners but it was also an element of new gentlemanly ideal. The honest and sincere gentleman respected womanly virtue and did not resort to low means for the sake pleasure. *The Tatler* wrote on William Wycherley’s play the *Country Wife* and it commented on the character of Horner, the libertine protagonist, who was ‘a good Representation of the Age in which that Comedy was written; at which Time, Love and Wenching were the Business of Life, and the Gallant Manner of pursuing Women, was the best recommendation at Court.’<sup>788</sup> According to the moral weekly, the real gentleman was the ‘Man of Sense’ but the libertine followed his irrational passions, and his overdeveloped imagination led him to the disaster.<sup>789</sup> Steele saw that the general poor condition of manners was caused by the imitation of libertine men and so ‘a general Dissolution of Manners arises from the one Source of Libertinism without Shame or Reprehension in the Male Youth. It is from this one Fountain that so many beautiful helpless young Women are sacrificed, and given up to Lewdness, Shame, Poverty, and Disease.’<sup>790</sup>

Dr. Johnson had a religious overtone in his condemnation. He wrote about the misery of the prostitutes, feeling Christian pity for the women of the town who ‘were all once, if not virtuous, at least innocent.’ But he was merciless towards the real culprits: ‘Let the libertine reflect the moment on the situation of that woman, who being forsaken by her betrayer, is reduced to the necessity of turning prostitute for bread, and judge of the enormity of his guilt by the evils which it produces.’<sup>791</sup> Johnson painted an appalling picture of the encounter of these two worlds. He asked how often ‘have the gay and thoughtless, in their evening frolics, seen a band of these miserable females, covered

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<sup>784</sup> Gwynn, *London and Westminster Improved*, 95.

<sup>785</sup> Fielding, *Enquiry*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>786</sup> Fielding, *Enquiry*, xxix.

<sup>787</sup> *The Complete Modern London Spy, for the Present Year, 1781* (by Gentleman of Fortune). London, 1781, 82-4.

<sup>788</sup> *The Tatler*, I, 31.

<sup>789</sup> *The Tatler*, I, 205-9, 217.

<sup>790</sup> *The Spectator* IV, 384.

<sup>791</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler*, II, 208.

with rags, shivering with cold, and pining with hunger; and, without either pitying their calamities, or reflecting upon the cruelty of those who perhaps first seduced them ... go on to reduce others to the same wretchedness by the same means?<sup>792</sup>

The religious critique was an old phenomenon, but in the eighteenth-century libertinage was condemned in the name of good manners, public spirit and conjugal happiness. 'A libertine may be represented as an earthly fiend, who spreads a general contagion around him, though the force of most corrupt principles and pernicious examples. His very employment is to project and execute mischievous designs, in which he never fails to be aided by his bown companions; for vice and infamy ever find abettors,' wrote the anonymous author of *The London Unmask'd*. According to him, a libertine was a figure outside the coordinates of ordinary life because 'no law can bind, no tie civil or sacred can restrain him; impelled by the force of most diabolical passions he pushes into the commission of the most fragrant enormities, regardless of present guilt and future consequences.'<sup>793</sup> The author represented the main stream opinion; libertinage and upper class debauchery continued to exist during the eighteenth century, of course, but the opinion of the reading public had become more intolerant in comparison to the Restoration age.

### *Low Practices*

'I should have mentioned last night that I met with a monstrous big whore in Strand, whom I had a great curiosity to lubricate, as the saying is,'<sup>794</sup> wrote Boswell in the *London Journal*. Sometimes his sexual adventures had grotesque and carnivalesque qualities; he registered naturalistically physical abnormalities and loathsome details, usually neutrally, sometimes with censure or coarse comic: 'I sauntered about all the day. I did not dine and was somewhat lowish. At night I strolled into the Park and took the first whore I met, whom I without many words copulated with free from danger, being safely sheathed. She was ugly and lean and her breath smelt of spirits.'<sup>795</sup> The physical disgust had mental effects, Boswell did not ask the girl's name and he remarked that 'when it was done, she slunk off. I had a low opinion of this gross practice and resolved to do it no more.'<sup>796</sup> But sometimes the comical aspects were the dominating element, as in the case of the 'monstrous big whore':

I went into a tavern with her, where she displayed to me all the parts of her enormous carcass; but I found that her avarice was as large as her a-, for she

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<sup>792</sup> Johnson, *The Rambler*, II, 209.

<sup>793</sup> *London Unmask'd*, 51-2.

<sup>794</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 240.

<sup>795</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 230-1.

<sup>796</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 230-1.

would by no means take what I offered her. I therefore with all coolness pulled the bell and discharged the reckoning, to her no small surprise and mortification, who would fain have provoked me to talk harshly to her and so make a disturbance. But I walked off with the gravity of a Barcelonian bishop.<sup>797</sup>

When the episode was over, Boswell was resolute in his decision to change his behaviour: 'So I went home, resolved against low street debauchery',<sup>798</sup> the remark ended.

Often the tone in the remarks about the sexual adventures was frolicsome and buoyant. 'I fell my on knees and kissed her hand: "My dear Kitty, you are a virtuous girl. I could marry you this moment,"' wrote Boswell in the spring 1768 after an affair with a Covent Garden lady called Kitty Brookes who was 'quite gay and obliging' and a highly skilled expert in the sexual practices.<sup>799</sup> In Covent Garden, in 1776, Boswell saw 'a very fine woman, elegantly dressed', and he got acquaintance with her, and the couple walked in Covent Garden Piazza in a hilarious mood: 'I walked in the Piazza with her, and was easy and gay and complimentary, and fancied I was agreeable.'<sup>800</sup> In the spring 1772, as a married man, Boswell was walking up the Strand and he passed through 'a variety of fine girls, genteelly dressed, all wearing Venus's girdle' and all of them were inviting him in 'amorous intercourse', and the pleasant situation raised speculations about 'polygamy and the concubines of the patriarchs and the harmlessness of temporary likings unconnected with mental attachment.' However, after the episode Boswell resolved that he would have never again come to London without bringing his wife along with him.<sup>801</sup>

Sometimes the remarks had a restless and anguished tone; the fear of a venereal disease was one reason – 'Jenny Taylor, the girl with whom I had lain last night, told me that she lived in Peter Street, Westminster. I was much afraid of having caught the venereal disorder, and went this forenoon to find her and examine her,'<sup>802</sup> ended an affair – and the guilty of infidelity was another. In the Charing Cross Bagnio, Boswell had gone bed with a 'wholesomelooking, bouncing wench' but after his desires were 'satiated by repeated indulgence' he could not rest and he was in a very anxious mood. Boswell remarked in his journal in the spring 1776:

I took a hackney-coach and was set down in Berkeley Square, and went home cold and disturbed and dreary and vexed, with remorse rising like a black cloud without any distinct form; for in truth my moral principle as to chastity was absolutely eclipsed for a time. I was in the miserable state of

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<sup>797</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 240.

<sup>798</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 240.

<sup>799</sup> Boswell, *Wife*, 153-4.

<sup>800</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 333.

<sup>801</sup> Boswell, *Defence*, 36-7.

<sup>802</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 304-5.

those whom the Apostle represents as working all uncleanness with greediness [Ephesians 4.19.]. I thought my valuable spouse with the highest regard and warmest affection, but I had a confused notion that my corporeal connexion with whores did not interfere with my love with her. Yet I considered that I might injure my health, which there could be no doubt was an injury to her. This is an exact state of my mind at the time. It shocks me to review it.<sup>803</sup>

For Boswell, marriage was like Edinburgh and libertinage like London: the former was associated with strong emotions and family duties as well as with images of narrowness and uniformity; the latter represented the variety of life, whimsicality, and freedom.

‘The counts and other pretty gentlemen told me whenever I admired a lady, “Sir, you can have her. It would not be difficult,”’ Boswell was informed in a Turin society when on the grand tour in 1765. First he was sure that his noble companions were joking but then he realized that they were in earnest; he noticed that ‘adultery was carried on without the least disguise.’ Boswell asked why did they marry; “Oh, it’s the custom; it perpetuates families” was the answer.<sup>804</sup> In Italy the young Boswell received a new perspective on the sexual behaviour: the untroubled and easy attitude towards licentiousness among the local nobility was a confusing experience. He noticed that the feeling of guilt about sexual offences was totally unknown among the fashionable society – ‘it must be said that the libertinism of Siena is like St. Paul’s charity: it thinketh no evil’ – and so the ‘gentlemen and ladies here do nothing against their consciences, for their consciences are quite another sort than those of people who live in a country where rigid morality is observed. So I can say philosophically that I have lived among very good people.’<sup>805</sup>

Boswell took a morally neutral stance to this phenomenon but he found the unproblematic attitude towards sexuality uncivilized. In Italy, he met people who thought ‘no more about virtues of sensitive souls than an American savage thinks of the pleasures of civilised nations’ and that the ‘Italians as well as the savages appeared to pass their time very agreeably,’ he noticed.<sup>806</sup> ‘Why then reproach the former for not possessing elegant and sublime virtues, when we do not blame the savages for having neither brilliant ballets nor serious operas,’ Boswell asked, and he continued that ‘virtue may be regarded as a luxury which all the world need not possess.’ He concluded that we should leave ‘others to live in peace according to their fancies and let us live according to ours, happy if we can find ways to pass without boredom or sadness this earthly existence of which we understand nothing.’<sup>807</sup> Boswell seemed to think that the sophisticated forms of civilized intercourse could never be unproblematic; the simple

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<sup>803</sup> Boswell, *Ominous Years*, 306.

<sup>804</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 25-6.

<sup>805</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 126-7.

<sup>806</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 111-112.

<sup>807</sup> Boswell, *Italy*, 111-112.



and unobtrusive adultery excluded the complex and subtle forms of gallantry and the finest nuances of eroticism.

On December 8, 1761, Boswell wrote to Andrew Erskine how ‘the delicious delicacy of sentiment and passion’ was ‘so very essential to a man of gallantry’<sup>808</sup>; in the autumn 1759, he rhymed to W. J. Temple in the lighthearted spirit of the Rococo: ‘An actress too (You know her name)/Is said to be his fav’rite Flame;/Great honour sure to soar so high/In the bright sphere of Gallantry.’<sup>809</sup> In his amorous fancies, Boswell pursued the most sophisticated forms of the gallant love. ‘Indeed, in my mind,’ the young Boswell fantasized in his journal, ‘there cannot be higher felicity on earth enjoyed by man than the participation of genuine reciprocal amorous affection with an amiable woman.’<sup>810</sup> He had ‘paradisical scenes’ of the gallant love where the man could have ‘a full indulgence of all the delicate feelings and pleasures both of body and mind, while at a same time in this enchanting union he exults with a consciousness that he is the superior person.’<sup>811</sup> Boswell felt that these scenes had had a civilizing effect on his person, they had exalted his ideas and refined his taste; he could not anymore be pleased ‘with the gross voluptuousness of the stews.’<sup>812</sup>

In the essay *On Love* (1778) he followed his general conception of civilization as cultivated nature. In the beginning there was passion which ‘while a man is under its influence, deprives him of all philosophy’.<sup>813</sup> Boswell referred to Pope’s ‘indelicat notion’ which represented ‘the amorous passion as nothing else but mere sensuality a little refined.’<sup>814</sup> Boswell could not share this unromantic attitude; he could not support the Platonic notion either – he referred to the Scythian philosopher Anacharsis, who when beaten by the command by a tyrant had stated that “you beat only the shell of Anacharsis”, and commented that ‘I doubt if there ever has been a lover, philosopher enough to be content with the kernel without the shell’<sup>815</sup> – but he compared the passion with fire which ‘may be kindled by the coarse materials’ but that it ‘burns into pure brightness.’ He concluded that ‘sensuality is the fuel by which the imagination is heated; but it will retain the heat long after the extinction of the fuel.’<sup>816</sup> During his stay in London 1762—63 Boswell had a famous “gallant” affair with an actress called Louisa. The lovers had some passionate and romantic encounters but the story ended in quite “low” a mood: Boswell caught a venereal infection from his mistress. The couple had an unpleasant discussion on the topic after which Boswell noted that he had ‘behaved with a manly composure and polite dignity that could not fail to inspire an

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<sup>808</sup> Boswell, *Letters Erskine*, 44.

<sup>809</sup> James Boswell, *Correspondence Temple*, 25.

<sup>810</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 84.

<sup>811</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 84.

<sup>812</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 84.

<sup>813</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 68.

<sup>814</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 69.

<sup>815</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 70.

<sup>816</sup> Boswell, *Column*, 69.

awe.<sup>817</sup> Gallant love was obviously, for him, an ideal form of amorous life. It followed his courtly visions and aristocratic gentlemanly ideals. This gentlemanly ideal had, however, a more ambiguous facet.

In real life, Boswell could not realize his fantasies of the gallant passion. When he left London for Utrecht in 1764 he wrote the programme of self-control which he named 'The Inviolable Plan' and in Holland he strived to control his sexual appetite. In Holland he had an affair with Belle de Zuylen (or Zélide), a highly intelligent, cultivated and emancipated woman, and this *affaire de coeur* encouraged his pursuit of self-control, polished behaviour and *retenu*. But Zélide's 'enigmatic charm' and self-conscious intelligence made Boswell restless; he had serious difficulties to adapt his basically frank and impulsive temperament to the demands of the Continental high society – and to the demands of the company of the gifted and independent woman.<sup>818</sup> 'Boswell's attitude towards women 'was grossly conventional,' writes Boswell's biographer Frederick A. Pottle. 'But Boswell,' he continues, 'though he was attracted to every variety of greatness in men, no matter how unconventional, actually disliked superior intelligence in women.'<sup>819</sup> Boswell's wife Margaret Montgomery was so virtuous and an admirable character and Boswell's emotions towards her were so deep that sometimes he was possessed by the feelings of inadequacy and resentment.<sup>820</sup> In short, his marriage was emotional but not very sensual, and his amorous life oscillated unsatisfyingly between the domestic duties and the carnal pleasures of the street.<sup>821</sup>

### *The Play with Masks*

Masquerade was a very controversial phenomenon in eighteenth-century culture. Masking had an important role in some social occasions: masquerade was a very popular public entertainment; also in some public occasions, women used masks; in very many discourses, public life was compared with theatre; and, changing of social roles was, according to contemporary literature, was very common habit in public entertainments. On the other hand, masking raised strong censure and the masquerade was associated with several vices and follies. In short, the changeableness of identity was one of the crucial themes on eighteenth-century cultural scene. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, in the Middle Ages masquerade was a part of the transgressive popular culture of laughter. Mask was an important element of the world of changing identities; mask was connected to the joy of corporeality, to the relative view of the

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<sup>817</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 159-160.

<sup>818</sup> Martin 1999, 154-7

<sup>819</sup> Pottle 1966, 144.

<sup>820</sup> Frank Brady, *James Boswell: The Later Years, 1769–1795*. New York, 1984, 122.

<sup>821</sup> See Thomas B. Gilmore, 'Boswell's Drinking', in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 24. No. 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 337-357.

world, to metamorphosis, to disappearance of the limits of identity.<sup>822</sup> In the early modern period, the culture of carnival had been declining, and although the eighteenth century was the great era of the masquerade, the attitudes towards masking and the carnivalesque had become ambiguous. In the end of the century, when ‘the modern regime of selfhood’ more and more identified identity with the unique and authentic self, the use of concrete or social masks became conspicuous and the status of the masquerade collapsed. Finally, the mask referred to horrific emptiness or to the dark secrets of individual personality.<sup>823</sup>

The changing of identity was also a controversial topic and especially so when it was connected with libertinage. ‘I had not proceed many paces, before I was accosted by an unfortunate beau, who on his return from a ball, where he had been exhibiting his charming person to delight and captivate the ladies, was vilely bespattered by a party of those necessary odoriferous adjutants whose work commences when that of others ceases’, the author of the pamphlet *The London Unmask’d* wrote. In a highly satirical tone, he wrote on the damage done to beau’s ‘most fashionable suit’. But the main problem was soon uncovered. In the course of the conversation, the writer realized that the beau ‘was one of those gentlemen with which the town and every assembly in it are constantly infested. I mean a gentleman constituted merely by dress, being totally ignorant of every punctilio that marks the man of fashion.’ In real world, ‘my beau in masquerade was in reality a journeyman barber’. The author continued to contemplate the moral dilemma: ‘Surely, (said I to myself) the world is one scene of masquerade, and every character appears under covert. Formerly the externals marked rank and degree, but now, if we would form a true estimate, the most probable means seems to be that of reversing appearances. To so notorious a degree of venality is the age arrived, that rank, character, genius, and even probity itself, are but secondary considerations.’<sup>824</sup>

The world of masks aroused the fear of moral collapse. It was clear that there was a strong discourse which required fixed and permanent identities, not transgressive play of masques. In the pamphlet *The Midnight Spy*, the author reflected the essence of the creatures of the London night life. The mentor told the author: ‘tis not common for persons here to assume an appearance thus different from their characters? What! is this London world in a mask? How then are we to judge mankind if persons of such a genteel appearance are capable of such dirty actions, what must we think of those whose very garb denotes infamy?’ The mentor Urbanus was in the mood of contempt: ‘What do you think that a bit of lace constitutes dignity, or that merit is centred in brocade? Experience my friend will teach you the contrary...that knaves here very often appear in embroidery, and the honest man in a thread-bare coat.’<sup>825</sup> The reason for this disquiet

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<sup>822</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (transl. Hélène Iswolsky). Bloomington, IN, 1984.

<sup>823</sup> Wahrman 2006, 264-276; see Sennett 1978 and Castle 1986.

<sup>824</sup> *London Unmask’d*, 12-13.

<sup>825</sup> *The Midnight Spy*, 13-14.

causing intermingling of identities was the ‘motley scene’ of the metropolis – the same motley scene which Boswell felt so stimulating. The writer continued: ‘The motley scene I am about to describe, may be justly deemed a world by itself, as it comprehends more singularities than the universe besides’.<sup>826</sup> The scene of nocturnal metropolis includes a carnivalesque mixture of highly heterogenous elements: ‘It contains a jumble of high and low, all pursuing different objects, according to their different dispositions. It is a seat of uninterrupted action, and like the perpetual motion, never standing still. ... In the city...the different objects perplex the gazing eye, and ravish the astonished mind, while the ears are stunned with incessant cries’.<sup>827</sup> The most important observation for the author of *The Midnight Spy* was not however the sensual but moral disorder; the high and the low also changed places in the moral sphere. The lack of the players’ fixed moral status on the scene of the social life was the fundamental argument.

Boswell saw the play with masks as a fundamental component of public life of a gentleman. Sometimes, he had a little ambiguous attitude towards the total masking of one’s person – ‘There is indeed a kind of character perfectly disguised, a perfect made dish, which is often found, both male and female, in London. This is most disgusting: plain nature is infinitely better. What I admire is nature improved by art, for art certainly may and does improve the nature’.<sup>828</sup> – but in some occasions, he enjoyed to play with masks and saw it as a complementary aspect of gentlemanly lifestyle. In Amsterdam in 1764, Boswell drank with criminal persons. He found a *Speelhaus*, where ‘I danced with a fine lady in laced riding clothes, a true blackguard minuet. I had my pipe in my mouth and performed like any common sailor. I had near quarrelled with one of the musicians’.<sup>829</sup>

In London, Boswell had called a certain Miss Watts whom he had found ‘neatly dressed and looking very well’. He was ‘easy and free’ with her and asked her to have a glass of wine at Shakespeare’s Head. Boswell told Miss Watts that he was a Highlander called Macdonald. The girl was highly fascinated because the Highlanders ‘had always spirit and generosity’. The couple had been shown into a ‘handsome room’ and they had ordered a bottle of sherry: ‘We sat near two hours and became very cheerful and agreeable each other. I told her with polite freedom,’ Boswell wrote in the *London Journal*, “‘Madam, I tell you honestly I have no money to give you, but if you allow me favours without it, I shall be much obliged to you.’” She smiled and said she would.’ But then Miss Watts received a message and Boswell had to give her up but he was confirmed of her ‘willingness to establish a friendly communication’ with him.<sup>830</sup>

The evening continued with the play with masks. Boswell was ‘in rich flow of animal spirits’ and when ‘burning with fierce desire’ he sallied forth to the Piazzas of

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<sup>826</sup> *The Midnight Spy*, 14.

<sup>827</sup> *The Midnight Spy*, 14–15.

<sup>828</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 177

<sup>829</sup> Boswell, *Holland*, 254.

<sup>830</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 263.

Covent Garden. ‘I met two very pretty little girls who asked me to take them with me. “My dear girls,” said I, “I am a poor fellow. I can give you no money. But if you choose to have a glass of wine and my company and let us be gay and obliging to each other without money, I am your man.”’ The girls agreed and the hilarious company went to the Shakespeare’s Head. At the destination Boswell had to check the backgrounds of the ladies from the waiter:

“I’ll look, your Honour,” cried he, and with inimitable effrontery stared them in the face and then cried, “They’ll do very well.” “What,” said I, “are they good fellow-creatures? Bring them up, then.” We were shown into a good room and had a bottle of sherry before us in a minute. I surveyed my seraglio and found them both good subjects for amorous play. I toyed with them and drank about and sung *Youth’s the Season* and thought myself Captain Macheath; and then I solaced my existence with them, one after one, according to their seniority.<sup>831</sup>

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of Boswell’s identification with Gay’s Captan Macheath in the *London Journal*.<sup>832</sup> The highwayman was a complementary figure to his reserved gentlemanly self, and Boswell was fascinated by the strong and primitive sexuality which the Captain represented. Macheath’s milieu, the London demimonde and underworld, was not without importance to Boswell: it was a part of the multiple character of London and it offered one perspective to the multiform nature of human life. Boswell’s attitude towards this facet of reality was as immediate and positively curious as towards any other scene of the metropolis. The scene in the Shakespeare’s Head reveals how strong Boswell’s identification with London was and how romantic visions he projected to the city: ‘I was quite *raised*, as the phrase is: thought I was in a London tavern, the Shakespeare’s Head, enjoying high debauchery after my sober winter. I parted with my ladies politely and came home in a glow of spirits.’<sup>833</sup> The expression ‘high debauchery’ referred to the dissipation according to the gentlemanly code. The low debauchery meant raking without the constraints of the polite behaviour.

In the king’s birthday in 1763, Boswell was not satisfied to be identified with a blackguard, now he *was* a highwayman: ‘I resolved to be a blackguard and to see all that was to be seen.’ The expression “to see all that was to be seen” was illustrative: Boswell found himself as an urban explorer who surveyed all the spheres of the metropolis without any moral distinctions. He designed his outlook for the low style performance: ‘I dressed myself in my second-mourning suit, in which I had been powdered many months, dirty buckskin breeches and black stockings.’<sup>834</sup> Then he took

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<sup>831</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 264.

<sup>832</sup> See Mackie 2009, Weed 1997/1998.

<sup>833</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 264.

<sup>834</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 272.

an oaken stick and imagined to be a “complete blackguard”: ‘I went to the Park [St. James’s], picked up a low brimstone, called myself a barber and agreed with her for sixpence, went to the bottom of the Park arm in arm, and dipped my machine in the Canal and performed most manfully.’<sup>835</sup> Then Boswell sauntered around St. Paul’s Churchyard, and in the Strand he picked up a ‘wretch’: ‘She allowed me entrance. But the miscreant refused me performance. I was much stronger than her, and *volens nolens* pushed up against the wall. She however gave a sudden spring from me; and screaming out, a parcel of more whores and soldiers came to her relief.’<sup>836</sup> Boswell got the soldiers on his side and ‘abused’ a woman in a ‘blackguard style’. And then the adventure continued at Whitehall: ‘I picked up another girl to whom I called myself a highwayman and told her I had no money and begged she would trust me. But she would not. My vanity was somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman in disguise.’<sup>837</sup> The mask was not intended to be perfect; it duplicated the identity of the city dweller. The play with identities was exceptionally clear in this scene; it was a part of Boswell’s theatrical interpretation of the world: just as the ‘double feeling’ was an integral part of the socialising in the polite world, so the masks were necessary in urban journeys into the lower spheres of the metropolis.

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<sup>835</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 272.

<sup>836</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 272–273.

<sup>837</sup> Boswell, *London Journal*, 273.

## EPILOGUE

Boswell's urban experience has several perplexingly different dimensions. According to the country-city dichotomy, he formulated the difference with terms which denoted distinctions between traditional forms of life and modernity. For Boswell, the countryside was the seat of narrowness, slowness, and uniformity, and, for the man of exceptional sensibility, the slow rhythm of life and uniform sensations could not offer sufficient stimuli. By contrast, the city was the scene of whimsicality, transitoriness, and multiple sensations. London was, for Boswell, the place where a 'man of imagination and feeling' could use his full potential and create a satisfactory sphere of life.

Boswell's attitude towards urban sensations was strongly emotional, immediate, and even ecstatic. This mode of experience has striking similarities with the sentimental and romantic ethos, but the content of Boswell's experience was conspicuously unromantic: he was fascinated by the crowd, the stream of transitory sensations, and the material opulence of the big city. All these were elements which the romantic sensibility found threatening to authentic forms of life and art. Addison's writings about the pleasures of the imagination and Lord Kames's garden aesthetics had an important impact on Boswell's reception of urbanity, but the aestheticism and the affirmation of the multiple sensations of the city had qualities which connected Boswell to later versions of urban sensibility, dandyism and *flânerie*.

At the same time, however, Boswell's urban experience had a deep-seated aristocratic feature, too. His fantasies of his family's feudal past can be seen as an expression of romantic sensibility, but he had attitudes which refer to the courtly and high-aristocratic forms of early modern public life. Boswell was clearly fascinated by something which Habermas called representative publicness. A highly important distinctive characteristic was the attitude towards court. Boswell did not share his contemporaries' strengthening critique of the court, and he seemed to be totally ignorant of the anti-court discourse of his idols Addison and Steele. By contrast, the aesthetic splendour of the German courts and the British noble houses made a strong impact on Boswell's sensitive mind; he identified with a romantic fervour with the magnificence of the fashionable milieu. This spectacular element can also be recognized in Boswell's attitude toward his own outward appearance: he was very conscious of his visible position in the urban display and by fashioning his dress and behaviour he sought to achieve as dazzling an impression as possible. It is highly interesting that this kind of aesthetics of existence had striking similarities with both the early-modern courtly ostentation and the nineteenth century *flânerie*.



Boswell's theory of politeness was possibly the most distinctive element of his urban experience. In the context of early-modern and eighteenth-century discussions about civility his conception of politeness had two seemingly inconsistent elements: its milieu was urban but its content was principally from the courtly code of politeness. Boswell was, like Addison and Johnson, a London gentleman of clubs and coffee-houses, but his principles of politeness had some typically courtly features and his ideal gentleman had obvious resemblances with the renaissance and baroque courtier. The crucial characteristics were focused on the question of authenticity and theatricality. For Boswell, the art of pleasing was fundamentally a theatrical display, and this became evident in his attitudes towards flattery, disguising one's real motives, and the changing of identity. Boswell recognized the public self as an aesthetic artefact, a work of art which was a result of active fashioning of the self. The urban sociability was, for him, a fashionable play with masks.

A highly significant detail in Boswell's gentlemanly figure was his libertine sexuality. It differed conspicuously from Addison, Steele, and Johnson's Christian-humanist gentlemanly ideals as well as from the pre-romantic cult of sincere and authentic love. It is obvious that he had some Restoration attitudes and figures in mind when writing about his sexual adventures. The libertine dimension could be seen as an element of Boswell's aristocratic gentlemanly ideal; he wanted to see himself in the costume of an early modern courtier, his vices included.

In Boswell's urban experience, the aesthetic dimension was present on its every level. He had very little moral, political or religious emphasises in his reflections on the urban life; he even transposed his sacral experiences into the aesthetical terms. On the theoretical level, Boswell was familiar with the contemporary aesthetical discussions, but his way of reflecting the world was also dominated by aestheticism. The urban world as a whole, with its courts and palaces, sites of pleasure and sociability, multitude of people and material opulence was, for Boswell, a source of aesthetic sensations. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he embraced the multiplicity of the city with an unreserved affection and ecstatic pleasure. As an observer of the urban spectacle, Boswell was an aesthete and a kind of *proto-flâneur*; as a gentlemanly figure he was a sentimental 'man of fancy and whim' in the disguise of an early-modern courtier.

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