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INTELLECTUAL FORMATIONS
IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CULTURAL POLITICS AND
SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE BRITISH PUBLIC SPHERE,
1802-32

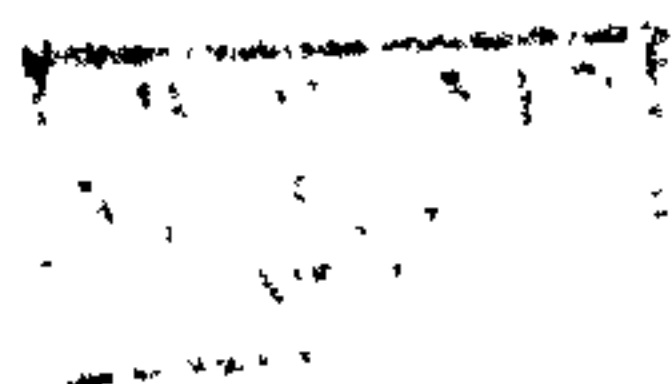
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Abstract

This thesis examines rival intellectual practices in the early nineteenth century through the theoretical framework of the Habermasian public sphere. Comparing the work of post-Scottish Enlightenment critics such as Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Thomas Carlyle, and their English radical plebeian counterparts, William Cobbett, T.J. Wooler and Thomas Spence, the thesis examines the bases of two divergent strategies of cultural resistance to the social crises of industrialism. By highlighting the ways in which a central literary genre like periodical social criticism was materially constructed out of distinctive modes of intellectual sociability, we can rethink the comparative political efficacy of rival idealist and materialist forms of intellectual praxis during a crucial transitional period. The argument serves as a corrective to the canonical studies of the 'big six' of English Romanticism by foregrounding cultural narratives occluded in traditional Romanticist scholarship: the underappreciated contribution made to Romantic period cultural history by marginalized national traditions, generic forms, and intellectual practices.

Reflecting the ideological complexity of these competing critical discourses and cultural narratives, and recognizing the value of a multi-perspectival approach, the dissertation is divided into two sections. The first offers a theoretical and historical overview of the British public sphere, while the second engages through a series of discrete readings with the texts of the critics themselves. In Chapter One I look at the original Habermasian model and the important recent revisions of it by the scholars Geoff Eley, Nancy Fraser and Craig Calhoun. In Chapter Two I discuss the cultural materialism of Raymond Williams in order to address significant questions of agency, and consider how John B. Thompson's concept of 'mediated symbolic interaction' contributes to a more general theory of symbolic cultural conflict. In Chapter Three I explore the institutional development of the Scottish Enlightenment and the ways in which it led to the project of bourgeois cultural criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*. In Chapter Four I examine how the plebeian public sphere based around journals like *The Black Dwarf* and the *Political Register* grew out of three seminal movements in radical English cultural history: the pamphleteering of the Levellers from the Revolutionary period of the 1640s; the mass, popular, and often non-literary cultural praxis of the Wilkites in the 1760s; and the prolific outpouring of politically directed critical writing from the Jacobin press of the 1790s. In Chapter Five the development of an influential bourgeois cultural project is traced through a series of essays in the *Edinburgh Review*, from Francis Jeffrey's observations on the 'condition of society', to Henry Brougham's writings on educational reform, culminating in Thomas Carlyle's innovative cultural criticism. In Chapter Six I look at the development of a parallel materialist intellectual project reflected in the writing of the agrarian socialist pioneer Thomas Spence, the 'Peterloo' writings of intellectual protest by T.J. Wooler, and the 'materialist Arcadianism' of William Cobbett from a series of articles in the *Political Register*.

Acknowledgments

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Willy Maley, for his patient guidance and tutelage in what the American social theorist C. Wright Mills called ‘intellectual craftsmanship’; those essential lessons in research, teaching and publication that any fledgling academic requires. He has been throughout the long period of research and writing of this thesis a patient academic mentor who has given generously of both his time and energy. During the many solitary hours of writing this dissertation I became acutely aware of the value of intellectual community. In this regard I was extremely fortunate to exchange ideas with and learn from participants in the fruitful seminars organized by the Department of English Literature’s Centre for European Romanticism. I would also like to thank Dr Alice Jenkins for inviting me to give a paper to the Department of English Literature’s Graduate Seminar in November 1998, which later evolved to become Part One of this study. I am indebted to fellow doctoral students Brian Graham and Tony Jarrells for the intellectual comradeship they have provided me over the course of my studies in Glasgow. Thanks are also due to Dr Ralph Jessop whose own pioneering work helped to inspire, and practical suggestions helped to improve, the argument and historical background to Chapter Five. I would like to thank Professor Kevin Gilmartin for the feedback he provided in response to my review of his study of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere, *Print Politics*, whose thesis argument will be found to have significantly shaped the conception of plebeian intellectual activism in Chapter Six. I am grateful for the help and patience of staff at Glasgow University Library, The National Library of Scotland, The Mitchell Library, and The Bodleian Library at Oxford University. I would also like to thank Professor Richard Cronin for taking the time to initiate me into the dark recesses of the Cobbett archives at Glasgow University Library.

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Introduction

The publication in English of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* provided a powerful theoretical framework for the study of such interrelated issues in nineteenth-century British cultural history as social representation, intellectual subjectivity and critical practice. By introducing the socialized intellectual model of the 'public sphere' and locating a specific historical context to its emergence, Habermas has widened the scope of British literary studies to include engagements with key aspects of cultural modernity; in particular the normative role played by an active, self-conscious and politically focused communicative rationality in redeeming the flawed moral project of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.¹ When taken in its widest sense as representative of intellectual formations linked by common print vehicles, associated forms of political activity, and distinctive cultural practices, Habermas's public sphere model has enabled a much broader examination of the social, cultural and political forces that have shaped literary-critical discourse in nineteenth-century British society.² The Habermasian model of the public sphere can also be viewed as a crucial theoretical supplement to a particular British practice of critical cultural history.

A relevant example of this British tradition of cultural history can be found in the work of the late Welsh cultural theorist Raymond Williams. In an early articulation of its methodology, Williams argues that cultural history 'must be more than the sum of the particular histories, for it is the relations between them, the particular forms of the whole organization, that it is especially concerned'.³ He continues: 'I would then define the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships. Analysis of particular works or institutions is, in this context, analysis of their essential kind of organization, the relationships which works or

institutions embody as parts of the organization as a whole.’⁴ It is a governing assumption of this study that Habermas’s model of the public sphere is the most relevant theoretical tool available to contemporary cultural historians in their ongoing effort to map the organization of cultural forms Williams speaks of here. Of course, these institutional expressions of culture must be studied over time in order to uncover the underlying ideological forces animating specific cultural practices. In particular, the effort to locate what Williams later called a ‘selective tradition’ within a wider history of cultural practices involves tracing the development over time of specific formations.⁵ Williams defines these formations as ‘those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions’.⁶ I would argue that Williams’s definition of cultural formations productively converges with Habermas’s notion of actively constituted public spheres, allowing for a new conceptual synthesis in the contemporary practice of cultural history. One of the key aims of this study will be to illustrate the utility of this theoretical synthesis through a mapping of rival intellectual formations in the Romantic period.

The period between 1802, marking the establishment of both the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Political Register*, and 1832, the year of the historic legislation of the Reform Bill, witnessed unprecedented cultural change in British society.⁷ During this thirty year span the social dislocation and economic changes associated with the rise of industrial capitalism, the radical agitations resulting from the political crisis of the French Revolution, and the avant-garde cultural experimentation of the Romantic movement, were all refracted through a public sphere of thriving journals, reviews and magazines. Indeed, it may be more accurate to describe the journalistic diversity of the period in the plural as *public spheres*; for the emergence of a coherent working-class intellectual and cultural consciousness to match that of the bourgeois *Edinburgh Review* signals an ideological complexity in the critical discourse of the Romantic period that the original Habermasian

model of the public sphere cannot address. However, the model's notions of public debate and critical engagement can be valuable conceptual abstractions in the attempt at recovering a sense of cultural agency from intellectual debates during this turbulent period. By examining the differing ways in which the rival bourgeois and plebeian public spheres reacted to the major cultural crises of the time we may get a clearer view the specific social roots of the 'universal' Romantic literary voices of protest.⁸

I argue that it was the distinctive institutional structures of critical discourse in the period—that is to say, the place it materially occupied within the wider public sphere—that largely determined its wider ideological and aesthetic identity as well as its particular critical trajectory. Related to this is my assumption that these materially unique institutions of discourse were themselves evolving out of a traditional split in the history of British prose dating from the seventeenth century that reached a particular watershed in the thirty year period from 1802 to 1832.⁹ Indeed, this attempt at periodization in early nineteenth century British cultural history becomes part of my larger argument concerning alternative ways of conceiving the period. By combining cultural and political events to frame the immediate historical parameters of my wider research in this study I am heeding the advice of the Scottish cultural historian Andrew Hook in his nuanced guidelines for the practice of cultural history; a necessarily provisional discipline whose methodology suffers from the lack of a stable institutional position within the academy (at least in the Anglo-American world). Hook writes that '... the individual literary work is best understood within the widest possible cultural context—including, that is, all those social, political, economic, religious, and intellectual forces which together determine the nature of society at any given time.'¹⁰ Within this revised historical framework I am attempting to locate a wider sense of the cultural production that was undertaken in the early nineteenth century in order to begin to rehabilitate the normative validity of heretofore occluded critical traditions.

It is an important corollary of my argument that we have come to understand the cultural history of the Romantic period through an ideologically restrictive epistemology. I argue along with the American critic Jerome McGann that contemporary practitioners of cultural history should seek out alternative cultural and intellectual traditions in order to ‘free present criticism from the crippling illusion that such a [reified] past establishes the limits, conceptual and practical, of our present and our future’.¹¹ I suggest that a revised understanding of the period can be attained through developments derived in part from contemporary cultural theory. Firstly, borrowing from the pluralist approach to the study of culture in the multidisciplinary cultural studies movement we can begin to see the period in terms of multiple subjectivities and contested positions of cultural production rather than from any one unified and universal Romantic tradition. Secondly, following the historical turn in Anglo-American Romantic period studies of the last twenty years, where a key group of critics and scholars have highlighted the ideological context of much canonical discourse and cumulatively published what amounts to no less than a ‘counter-tradition’ of this period of British cultural history, I am seeking to trace the material conditions of cultural production of two competing practices of social criticism. It is hoped that by highlighting these material conditions of cultural production we can better appreciate the complex interaction of ideology, subjectivity and discourse in the early nineteenth-century British public sphere. With the recent flowering of Romantic period studies in this broad cultural materialist and historicist vein—one thinks of here Marilyn Butler’s *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981), Jerome McGann’s *The Romantic Ideology* (1983), Jon Klancher’s *The Making of English Reading Audiences* (1987), Iain McCalman’s *Radical Underworld* (1988), David Worrall’s *Radical Culture* (1992), Kevin Gilmartin’s *Print Politics* (1996), and David Lloyd and Paul Thomas’s *Culture and the State* (1998)—I feel it is an ideal time to consider these key issues of early nineteenth-century British cultural history from the perspective of a revitalized theoretical approach.¹² Indeed, as part of my

examination I hope to constructively engage with some of the most compelling arguments that have emerged out of these recent studies.

This main body of my study is broken into two parts: one consisting of conceptual clarification and historical background; and the other of critical readings of the primary texts of social criticism. The conceptual discussion in chapter one will review the defining bourgeois characteristics of the original Habermasian model before moving on to engage with its interrogation and revision by the critical theorists Geoff Eley, Nancy Fraser and Craig Calhoun. In chapter two I seek to grasp from a theoretical perspective the manner in which the mediation of cultural change by leading intellectuals functions on a symbolic level in the respective public spheres. In this chapter I will draw on Raymond Williams's theoretical approach of cultural materialism to address the complex interdynamics of emergent, residual and dominant cultural formations in the British public sphere. The social theorist John B. Thompson's concept of 'symbolic interaction' will be also be reviewed for its contribution towards a general theory of 'symbolic cultural conflict' in the public sphere.

The historical background in chapters three and four will review the various institutional antecedents of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres of the early nineteenth century. In this socio-historical approach to the British public sphere I am guided by Williams's instructions regarding the necessity of historical context for the wider study of specific intellectual formations. Williams suggests that a proper socio-cultural analysis of intellectual movements 'means asking questions about the social formation of such groups, within a deliberate context of a much wider history, involving very general relationships of social class and education'.¹³ This historical contextualization of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres will need to establish the distinctive ideological trajectories that led to their profound divergence in intellectual practice.

In chapter three I will examine the historical relationship of the Scottish Enlightenment to the rise of bourgeois cultural criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*, which, following Jon Klancher's thesis in *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, I take to be a paradigm of liberal bourgeois audience-making in the early nineteenth century.¹⁴ This uncovering and identification of the precise social roots of the 'universal' critical voice projected in the journal also provides a particular European case study of the Enlightenment intellectual idealism so central to Habermas's original conception of the public sphere. The Kantian notion of a transcendental rational subjectivity that Habermas traces in the classical bourgeois public sphere will be materialized in the discrete socio-intellectual institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment. In particular emphasis will be given to tracing the emergence of a specific bourgeois cultural discourse found in institutional locations like the debating societies and student clubs of Enlightenment Edinburgh, the reformed General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and the moral philosophy classrooms of the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Central to my understanding of the critical discourse of the bourgeois public sphere is an appreciation of the relationship between the broad humanistic educational traditions of the Scottish Enlightenment at Edinburgh University and the general reviewer's topical discourse found in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*; ranging from history, literature and metaphysics, to moral philosophy and politics. Also, the historical development of the metropolitan literary public sphere in Britain will be briefly reviewed with reference to the two most influential eighteenth-century London journals: the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Particular emphasis will be given to their cultural impact on the emerging liberal public sphere in early eighteenth-century Edinburgh.

It is a central argument of this study that the plebeian public sphere based around the pamphlets of Thomas Spence and journals like *The Black Dwarf* and the *Political Register* did much to shape the working-class's collective political and cultural consciousness in the early nineteenth century. In contrast to the respectable Whiggish political and social roots of the bourgeois public sphere, the development of this plebeian

public sphere requires a rather more expansive historical examination of the interaction between popular political movements and cultural expression from the English to the French Revolutions. In chapter four the distinctive cultural politics of the plebeian public sphere will be traced back to three discrete formations in radical cultural history: the social contexts of radical English pamphleteering from the Revolutionary period of 1640s; the mass, popular, and often non-literary cultural praxis of the Wilkite protests of the 1760s; and the politically-directed discourse from the British Jacobin press of the 1790s. Far from assuming a polite and highly individualized model of cultural association, the combative and confrontational style of writing in the plebeian public sphere evolved out of a radical oral tradition nurtured in the collective popular fora of the crowd, assembly and tavern. And, interestingly for the comparative purposes of this study, the plebeian public sphere exhibited, in contrast to its bourgeois counterpart, a reverse trajectory to the dominant pattern of British metropolitan intellectual culture. It was the provincial English Jacobin press, and political societies like the Sheffield Constitutional Society, that set the organizational model for metropolitan radical intellectual movements like Thomas Hardy's London Corresponding Society.¹⁵

The second part of this study will critically examine a series of important essays, pamphlets and articles from the bourgeois and plebeian components of the early nineteenth century British public sphere.¹⁶ The aim of this portion of the dissertation will be hermeneutical rather than empirical; I seek to uncover competing ideological projects from the different traditions of intellectual and cultural praxis in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres. In chapter five the development of a utilitarian/idealist critical discourse will be mapped in a series of essays in the *Edinburgh Review*, beginning with Francis Jeffrey's engagement with, and revision of, philosophical Common Sense—the official academic project of the Scottish Enlightenment in the early nineteenth century; continuing in Henry Brougham's writings on utilitarian popular education that culminated in the founding of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge; and ending in Thomas Carlyle's

prototypical essay in Romantic cultural critique, 'Signs of the Times'. Likewise, in chapter six a competing radical materialist critical project will be traced in the utopian projections of the agrarian socialist pioneer Thomas Spence in the early part of the period; the practical economic writing of William Cobbett taken from the first decade of the *Political Register*; T.J. Wooler's protest writing in the *Black Dwarf* before, during, and after Peterloo; culminating in the 'materialist Arcadianism' of Cobbett in his landmark series of articles for the *Political Register* in the mid-1820s, 'Rural Rides'. My selection of specific texts from the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres reflects a desire to highlight contrasts in intellectual practice from these two contemporaneous critical reactions to the moral crisis of industrial capitalism in the period. This selection is also determined by the need to creatively move between theoretical abstractions and textual specificity, rather than the desire for a more comprehensive overview of periodical social criticism in the period; a task that has already been undertaken by Jon Klancher in his groundbreaking *The Making of English Reading Audiences*. As the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' (CCCS) Cultural History Group first proposed some twenty five years ago, the developing practice of Marxist cultural history should seek to 'move systematically through different levels of abstraction describing and examining particular histories and situations but "doing theory" all the time'.¹⁷

Related to this juxtaposition of competing projects of cultural criticism in part two will be a review of some important questions of intellectual agency in the British public sphere. The respective reactions of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres to the cultural and social crisis of industrialism will be examined in relation to the specific institutional developments of each intellectual tradition. The radical political response in the plebeian public sphere to this social crisis will be compared with the defensive posture of cultural criticism found in Thomas Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'. The German Romantic concept of culture as *Bildung*, or individual self-cultivation, pioneered by Carlyle as a basis for social critique needs to be contrasted with the collective and materialist conception of

culture articulated by radical plebeian intellectuals like Spence, Wooler and Cobbett. This fundamental divergence in critical discourse has been observed by David Lloyd and Paul Thomas in their essay '*Culture and Society* or "Culture and the State"'.¹⁸ After failing to locate a working-class version of the Romantic discourse of cultural criticism that culminated in Arnold's high Victorian polemic *Culture and Anarchy*, they argue that: '... it rapidly became apparent that this ignoring of what seemed since *Culture and Society* the dominant tradition was by no means simple ignorance but a systematic refusal on the part of working-class and some petty bourgeois writers to accept the division of education, politics, and economics into separate if interinfluential spheres.'¹⁹ Indeed, it will be my contention that this distinctively materialist discourse on culture in the plebeian public sphere located by Lloyd and Thomas was reflective of an alternative critical epistemology based on the collective intellectual subjectivity, immediate political requirements and pedagogical aims of its participants. I will argue that this divergence between bourgeois and plebeian cultural criticism can be traced to the contested development of different intellectual subjectivities and cultural ideologies in the rival public spheres, finally manifesting itself into a respective internalization and externalization of oppositional cultural praxis.

My distinction, in part two, between a radical materialist discourse of social criticism on the one hand, and an Romantic idealist one on the other, is based on a conception of civil society and social transformation articulated by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1846). For them, civil society is defined as the 'form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces' embracing 'the whole material intercourse of individuals' during the stages of development of those productive forces.²⁰ Crucially for the later development of the foundational Marxian concept of historical materialism, Marx and Engels argue that two opposing epistemologies of history are produced out of these socio-cultural transitions. The first, 'idealistic view of history', is an expression of metaphysical self-consciousness that seeks through 'mental criticism' to locate change and

transformation in the subjective perception of human events.²¹ The second, materialist view of history ‘remains constantly on the real *ground* of history’, explaining the ‘formation of ideas from material practice’ and seeking cultural transformation ‘only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations’ rather than through a metaphysical act of critical idealism.²² I hope to demonstrate in chapters five and six that these two conceptions of history parallel the different forms of cultural praxis in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres of the early nineteenth century. Through selective readings of the critical discourse in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* I will argue that a particular bourgeois narrative of cultural transformation emerges; one that above all seeks the peaceful ideological integration of its readership into the new industrial capitalist order through a process of individual moral development and aesthetic refinement. In sharp contrast to the aims of this elite cultural project was the view of collective material and political emancipation expressed in the key writings of the plebeian public sphere, where the ideas behind capitalist modernization are exposed to an audience just beginning to realize their own sense of cultural agency.

This leads to a consideration of the practical theoretical implications of this study. It is important to distinguish in what ways this speculative cultural history seeks to further the application and development of Habermas’s critical theory of society, first historicised with his particularized neo-Kantian inflection in *Structural Transformation*, and reaching its theoretical culmination some twenty years later in his concept of communicative praxis in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). By examining the mediation of intellectual subjectivities in the British public sphere from a comparative class perspective, I hope to clarify in a practical way the value of Habermas’s own significant revision of classic Marxist social theory. The reconstruction of historical materialism with an emphasis on a communicative dynamic that highlights intersubjective praxis, or as he calls it, ‘communicative action’, forms the primary basis of Habermas’s critical theory of society.²³ Indeed, this engagement with Habermasian social theory is more than simply an abstract

consideration and helps to account for the way in which I approach the issue of class generally in my conception of the British public sphere.

My approach to the class dynamics of intellectual formations in the Romantic period broadly follows Gareth Stedman Jones in his contention from *Languages of Class* (1983) that ‘class is... a discursive rather than... an ontological reality’, one that requires an effort to ‘explain languages of class from the nature of politics rather than the character of politics from the nature of class’.²⁴ I would add to this that it was the differentiated nature of political *necessity* in plebeian and bourgeois intellectual circles that is the key to understanding the differing strategies of cultural politics employed by the leading critical intellectuals in the public sphere. Reducing the study of intellectual practices in the early nineteenth century to an overly restrictive definition of class may obscure the ways in which the leading bourgeois and plebeian intellectuals functioned as symbolic actors within their respective fields of cultural production.

I will conclude this introduction with a consideration of where this study can be placed in a contemporary disciplinary sense. With reference to the broad trajectory of historicist Romantic period studies discussed above, this examination of the cultural politics of the early nineteenth century public sphere seeks to further the applied development of the Habermasian model within a comparative dynamic that highlights the practical political efficacy of competing intellectual practices. In this qualified sense I hope to add to the general flourishing of the recent ‘theoretical turn’ in Romantic period studies. In my focus on the specific ideological meanings of differing intellectual and cultural subjectivities this study seeks to both engage with—as well as to update—an influential tradition of British Marxist cultural studies found in the work of E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Johnson. If the methodological and theoretical heterodoxy displayed in this study goes against some of the contemporary trends in the field of Romantic literary history, it is out of an earnest effort to underline the material structures of intellectual and cultural struggle during the period; something achieved by recent cultural materialist readings of the

Renaissance by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield but lacking in contemporary scholarship on the Romantic period.²⁵ In this sense my study *does not* engage with the still resolutely textual approaches of English literary studies, but instead seeks to tap into (and perhaps contribute towards) an ongoing tradition of theoretical cultural studies. In his important speculative consideration of this interdisciplinary formation in 1983 entitled ‘What is Cultural Studies Anyway?’, Richard Johnson argued that a theoretically informed practice of cultural studies should contain three main premises:

The first is that cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations, especially with class relations and class formations... The second is that culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs. And the third, which follows the other two, is that culture is neither autonomous nor an externally determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles.²⁶

I would hope that the following study proves able, if only in a small way, to further this ambitious agenda through a consideration of competing intellectual practices in those culturally revolutionary first three decades of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

¹ This study will concentrate on a reading of Habermas's project of critical theory that emphasizes the macro-social aspect of communication most clearly reflected in works like *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) and *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), rather than on the micro-linguistic concern for the 'ideal speech situation' discussed in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (1981) pp. 62-76. It is important to understand that the Habermasian objective of the 'ideal speech situation' can never be separated from the larger social contexts of communication. For a good discussion of the interaction between these micro-linguistic and macro-social aspects of Habermasian critical theory, see John Forester, 'Introduction: The Applied Turn in Contemporary Critical Theory', ed. by John Forester, *Critical Theory and Public Life* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1985) pp. ix-xix.

² There have been some excellent, if somewhat passive and incomplete, recent applications of the Habermasian model of the public sphere to modern intellectual and political movements. The best studies in an Anglo-American context are Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From 'The Spectator' to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984); Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). In a French context this model has been more explicitly applied and better integrated in the work of the so-called 'New' Cultural History. For an example from one of the leading practitioners of this movement see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); for American contributions to the cultural histories of the French revolution and the French Enlightenment, respectively, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere In The Age Of The French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and Julia Simon, *Mass Enlightenment: Critical Studies in Rousseau and Diderot* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1992 [first publ. 1961]), p. 46.

⁴ Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 46-7.

⁵ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 117.

⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 117.

⁷ I have specifically chosen the latter date in my study to illustrate a moment of 'cultural rupture' in the British public sphere, rather than as a representation of the British state's defining moment of political consolidation—a traditional interpretation of positivist British historiography. This perspective borrows from Michel Foucault's notion of 'effective' history as discussed in his influential essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History': 'An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity—as a teleological movement or a natural process. 'Effective' history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of the masked 'other'. The forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts.' See Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London and New York: Penguin, 1991), pp. 76-100 (p. 88).

⁸ For two primary reasons I will use the collective description of 'plebeian' rather than 'proletarian' in the rest of this study when referring to the this portion of the British public sphere related to its bourgeois

counterpart. Firstly, in the period of my study--the first third of the nineteenth century--a distinctive proletarian class-consciousness had not yet developed in the classic Marxist sense. Secondly, the label 'proletarian' has already been used in a very specific way in a highly influential German engagement with the Habermasian model, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972). In the introduction to their study, Negt and Kluge underline the utopian aspirations informing their conceptual use of a 'proletarian public sphere': '...it does refer to a strategic position that is substantively meshed with the history of the emancipation of the working class'. See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xlv. I am hesitant to use a term that has been invested with such a utopian impulse which I feel mirrors Habermas's own idealization of the rationality to be found in the classic liberal bourgeois public sphere.

⁹ A similar observation has been made by Terry Eagleton in his exemplary, if underappreciated, theoretical-historical examination of British criticism, *The Function of Criticism*. In that work he implicitly suggests the existence of a coherent radical critical tradition which for him defines the ideological nature of the split in the English critical institution between a radical criticism, beginning with Milton, that had a substantive political function, and a genteel, largely aestheticist tradition of amateur liberal humanism that would culminate in the canonical cultural criticism of Arnold in the mid-nineteenth century. See Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 36.

¹⁰ Andrew Hook, 'Introduction', in *The History of Scottish Literature: 1660-1800*, ed. by Andrew Hook, vol. 2 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), p. 1.

¹¹ Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 3.

¹² See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*; Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*; Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998 [first publ. in 1988]); David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992); Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹³ Raymond Williams, 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 148-69 (p. 150).

¹⁴ See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 4.

¹⁵ The cultural dynamics of the British state in the eighteenth century created unique--and in some cases ironic--patterns of exclusion and inclusion. It could be argued that the middle-class intellectual elite of Edinburgh were the greatest beneficiaries of Union in a cultural and political sense, while the masses of workers in the newly industrializing parts of England had the most to lose from the commercial modernity of a new metropolitan British state. For an influential articulation of this argument see Linda Colley's chapter 'Peripheries' in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994), pp. 101-45. T.C. Smout has discussed the complex nature of Scotland's 'satellite' cultural status during this period in his article 'Scotland in the 17th and 18th centuries—A Satellite Economy?', in *The Satellite State in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. by Ståle Dyrvik, Knut Mykland and Jan Oldervoll (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1979), pp. 9-35.

¹⁶ In *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, Jon Klancher chose to break this cultural divide into four distinctive parts. For purposes relating to his overall aim of a comprehensive cultural overview of

periodical readership formation in the Romantic period, Klancher locates discrete middle-class; mass; and polemical-radical audiences; as well as what he calls 'the special institutional' audience centred around the Coleridgean idea of the 'clerisy'. As will become more clear in the developing argument of this study, however, my own respective categories of bourgeois and plebeian public spheres tend to overlap with the polemical-radical and middle-class audiences mapped by Klancher. See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan and Bill Schwarz, 'Economy, Culture and Concept: Three Approaches to Marxist History', *Stencilled Occasional Papers* (Birmingham: CCCS, 1977), p. 54.

¹⁸ See David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, 'Culture and Society or "Culture and the State"', in *Cultural Materialism: On Raymond Williams*, ed. by Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 268-304.

¹⁹ Lloyd and Thomas, 'Culture and Society or "Culture and the State"', pp. 277-8. Of course, this reading by Lloyd and Thomas relies on a rather narrow interpretation of Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* as a study primarily devoted to bourgeois intellectual dissidence. I take issue with this reading of Williams's text in my own conception of the British cultural materialist tradition. For a more extended discussion of this critique of Lloyd and Thomas's thesis here, see my review of their 1998 study, *Culture and the State*, in *Textual Practice*, 12 (1998), 390-6.

²⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One*, trans. by W. Lough, ed. by C.J. Arthur, 2nd edn (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), p. 57.

²¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 58.

²² Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 58-9.

²³ See Tom Rockmore, *Habermas On Historical Materialism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 70-89.

²⁴ See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 8.

²⁵ See Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

²⁶ Richard Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?', *Stencilled Occasional Papers* (Birmingham: CCCS, 1983), p. 3.

Part One

A Theoretical and Historical Overview of the British Public Sphere: Backgrounds, Trajectories and Developments

Crucial to this study of cultural politics in the early nineteenth-century British public sphere is a re-examination of Habermas's original model of the bourgeois public sphere from his 1962 study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.¹ In chapter one I consider the Habermasian model through an extended discussion of its origins in the Enlightenment narrative constructed by Habermas. Accompanying this review of the bourgeois public sphere will be an analysis of the so-called 'plebeian' public sphere; a theoretical model adapted by the German scholar Günther Lottes and acknowledged by Habermas at a conference to mark the English translation of *Structural Transformation* in 1989.² The same conference also provided some important intellectual contestation and problematization of the original Habermasian model by the scholars Geoff Eley, Nancy Fraser and Craig Calhoun. These three in particular chose to re-assess the model of the classic liberal public sphere developed by Habermas from historical, feminist and radical democratic perspectives. Indeed, because of the relative novelty of the concept of the public sphere in the English-speaking academic world, each discussion inevitably—but necessarily and constructively—overlaps with criticism from the other. Their revisions of the Habermasian model will also be discussed in chapter one.

In chapter two I will use these revisions to help clear the way for an application of Raymond Williams's theory of cultural materialism to the study of the specific intellectual dynamics in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres of the early nineteenth century. In this chapter I will also use the Habermasian model—in its original and revised forms—to examine the cultural processes of modernity and their construction in the media as discussed by the social theorist John B. Thompson. Thompson's theory of 'symbolic mediation'—the idea that the formation of the self in the modern world develops through new forms of symbolic interaction with the material resources of the media—has influenced my own, necessarily provisional, theory of symbolic cultural conflict in the British public sphere. Finally, I will close the chapter with a brief review of Habermas's related theories

of ‘communicative action’ and the ‘Lifeworld’, and argue for their relevance to the development of a new praxis-based conception of British cultural criticism.

As part of the background to the critical readings undertaken in part two it will also be necessary to review the distinctive institutional developments of the rival bourgeois and plebeian public spheres of the early nineteenth century. It is hoped that chapters three and four will function as an historical overview of the differing forms of intellectual practice in these respective public spheres, illustrating the ways in which each public sphere developed its own strategies of ideological legitimation and cultural critique. In chapter three I seek to locate the origins and trace the development of a particular Enlightenment tradition of intellectual discourse that became materialized as a bourgeois metropolitan formation with the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802. This ‘ideological excavation’ of the early nineteenth-century bourgeois public sphere will read back from its institutional origins in the eighteenth century specific intellectual trends, social patterns, and organizational specificities that inform my readings of the social criticism of the *Edinburgh Review* in chapter five. Part of this social history of bourgeois intellectual practice will attempt to demonstrate how the discourse of ‘moral journalism’ in journals like the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, and the primary institutional spaces of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere—the moral philosophy lecture and the debating society—helped to frame and circumscribe the development of social criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*.

In chapter four I undertake a similar study of the unique institutional roots of the rival plebeian intellectual tradition. The development of a popular, politically radical and praxis-based mode of intellectual critique will be traced with reference to three key historical episodes. Starting with the intellectual radicalism of such groups as the Levellers during the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, and continuing on with the popular cultural praxis of the Wilkite petitioners a century later, up to the constructions of radical intellectual community among the London and provincial Jacobin societies during and after the French Revolution, I hope to demonstrate common patterns of intellectual

intervention, modes of dissemination, and trajectories of critical discourse reflected in the cultural politics of the leading radical plebeian intellectuals in the early nineteenth century.

NOTES

¹ This kind of extended review of the Habermasian public sphere, and its place within the cultural history of modern Europe, has been most satisfactorily achieved in the recent study of the French 'new' cultural historian Roger Chartier on the cultural origins of the French Revolution. In his chapter, 'The Public Sphere and Public Opinion', Chartier grounds the Habermasian model historically, allowing its most pressing--and problematical--ideological dimensions to arise within the context of the ambiguous evolution of the idea of 'the public' during the French Enlightenment and its subsequent implications for the French Revolution. It is hoped chapter one of this study will serve a similar purpose, albeit with an emphasis on the theoretical revisions of the Habermasian model for the purposes of understanding the specific cultural and ideological issues of the early nineteenth-century British public sphere. See Roger Chartier, 'The Public Sphere and Public Opinion', in *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 20-37.

² Jürgen Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', trans. by Thomas Burger, in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 421-57 (pp. 425-426). See also Günther Lottes, *Politische Aufklärung und plebejisches Publikum: Zur Theorie und Praxis des englischen Radikalismus im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1979).

Chapter One

A Critical Review of the Habermasian Model of the Public Sphere

In *Structural Transformation* Habermas argues that the liberal public sphere emerged at a particularly progressive moment in the development of bourgeois capitalism during the eighteenth century in post-feudal European states like Britain, France and Germany. The potential radicalism of this social by-product of early modern capitalism lay in its unprecedented critical independence from the primary official governing institutions of the time found in the monarchy and the church. Habermas stresses that the emerging public sphere was still a part of the civil society then dominated by the court, state and church spheres but also becoming distinctive as a 'realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws'.¹ Habermas elucidates this basic part of the new public sphere's anatomy thus:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason.²

For Habermas this new institution of eighteenth-century Western European civil society retained the idealized intellectual characteristics of the ancient Greek *polis* without that society's rigid and inhibiting hierarchy; a quality that suggests its potentially revolutionary social, political and cultural aspects. Habermas continues:

Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all. In the discussions among citizens issues were made topical and took shape. In the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence - the immortality of fame.³

Habermas already betrays in this early formulation of the bourgeois public sphere the Kantian notions of universality and individual transcendence through democratic exchange that will re-appear throughout his study. Indeed, as Terry Eagleton observed in *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), this new public sphere defined its notions of equality, freedom of expression, and tolerance for intellectual difference in a classically bourgeois manner: ‘the predominance it grants to individual sensibility, the free circulation of enlightened opinion and the abstractly equalized status of its socially diverse participants, mark it as a peculiarly bourgeois social formation’.⁴

The institutional criteria of the respective liberal bourgeois public spheres in Britain, France and Germany reveals a shared Enlightenment orientation. The first and most important distinguishing characteristic of this new liberal communicative space is its preservation of a critical intercourse that disregards outside social status. According to Habermas: ‘The parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of the social hierarchy and in the end carry the day meant, in the thought of the day, the parity of “common humanity”’.⁵ Although illuminating in its observation that the ‘universal’ critical voice of the Enlightenment had very definite bourgeois roots, I want to suggest that this conception ignores the substantial intellectual and political claims of the rival plebeian public sphere. The second characteristic of the bourgeois public sphere relates specifically to the culture of independent critical mediation created in the improvisational literary networks of coffeehouses, taverns and salons. For this intellectually dynamic part of the European bourgeoisie, literary discourse became a legitimating form of social critique in a manner previously confined to the dominant institutions of church and state. As part of the cultural development of bourgeois capitalism, social issues were increasingly engaged with in philosophical and literary works produced for a more publicly accessible ‘cultural market’: ‘The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it in as much as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another),

verbalize it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority.’⁶ It is important to stress that in Habermas’s historical schema the political public sphere in Enlightenment Europe evolved ‘under the cover’, as it were, of an apolitical literary public sphere; a process, we shall see, reversed in the development of the rival plebeian public sphere.

The final defining characteristic of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere invites serious critical revision. Habermas argues that the socially dynamic processes of commodification in classical bourgeois societies of the eighteenth century created the idea of a public that was in principle inclusive:

However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion.⁷

The small qualifying caveat of ‘propertied and educated’ which Habermas inserts here functioned to exclude a majority of the intellectual public during the eighteenth century. That Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as consisting of private, discrete individuals and groups also recalls the central—and highly problematic—issue of the kind of subjectivity within which these figures interacted. I argue that a normative ‘counter-model’ of the public sphere emerging out of radical intellectual circles in the late eighteenth century fundamentally challenges these very restricted, exclusive and elitist criteria.

In 1989 Habermas responded to the English translation of *Structural Transformation* by critically re-examining the distinctly bourgeois identity of his original model of the public sphere. This re-assessment occurred in the context of a conference that brought together some important revisions and contestations of his original model from the perspective of contemporary developments in critical and social theory. Before embarking on an examination of these important revisions of the Habermasian model, it may be useful to briefly survey Habermas’s own revision of his original model from *Structural*

Transformation. With this re-assessment we can more clearly locate the specific cultural and economic contradictions intrinsic to his original conception of the public sphere and, perhaps, open up his model to a much wider range of intellectual society.

In his opening remarks Habermas acknowledged the fundamental difference that a broader view of the competing public spheres from the period he examined would have made. He writes, ‘a different picture emerges if *from the very beginning* one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere’.⁸ It is precisely this retrospective recognition by Habermas of the co-existence of competing public spheres—each with their own distinct historical backgrounds and cultural narratives—that forms the basis of the comparative cultural history undertaken in chapters three and four of this study. Habermas specifies why a politically radical and socially populist public sphere developing apart from the dominance of the Enlightenment bourgeoisie was omitted from his 1962 study: ‘With regard to the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution and the Chartist movement, I spoke of the beginnings of a “plebeian” public sphere, and considering it merely a variant of the bourgeois public sphere that remained suppressed in the historical process, I believed neglecting it justifiable.’⁹ Significantly for the historical narrative of the plebeian public sphere I construct in chapter four, Habermas acknowledges the importance of the pioneering historiography of the British New Left in any substantial revision of his model: ‘However, in the wake of E.P. Thompson’s pathbreaking *The Making of the English Working Class* there appeared a multitude of investigations concerning the French and English Jacobins, Robert Owen and the activities of the early socialists, the Chartists, and also the left-leaning populism in early nineteenth century France. These studies have provided a different perspective on the political mobilization of the rural lower classes and the urban workers.’¹⁰ Out of these studies Habermas seems to recognize the independent development of a radical plebeian public sphere with its own normative referents. With specific reference to Mikhail

Bakhtin's seminal book *Rabelais and His World*, but equally relevant to the important historical studies of the British New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, Habermas speaks of this counter-culture absent from his own study: 'This culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines.'¹¹ It is revealing, however, that Habermas associates the plebeian public sphere with violent social revolt against an oppressive order, in contrast with his bourgeois model of a liberally organized—and above all nonviolent—communicative rationality.

Habermas is clearly attempting here to absorb the cultural challenge of a plebeian public sphere by relating it dialectically to the bourgeois model of his original study. In an important recent study that compellingly argues for the central place of the manifesto in the cultural repertoire of the plebeian public sphere, entitled *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (1999), Janet Lyon has recognized this appropriation by Habermas as one that attempts to suppress the distinctive cultural referents of the plebeian public sphere in favour of the more 'polite' systems of discourse central to the bourgeois public sphere: 'For Habermas to construe the plebeian public sphere as a political satellite of the bourgeois public sphere... is to guarantee in advance the plebeian public sphere's "orientation" toward a social sphere and mode of discourse that the manifesto often explicitly repudiates.'¹² As I argue in chapters four and six of my study, this kind of synthesis by Habermas fundamentally misreads both the historical trajectory and ideological complexity of the symbolic cultural politics practiced in the plebeian public sphere. Indeed, one of the key aims of this study is to construct a wider theoretical and historical lens with which to view the politically and socially differentiated traditions of British cultural criticism, each with their own distinctive rhetorical and political strategies. I argue in part two that the most explicit illustration of this complex intellectual differentiation in the British public sphere

were the competing materialist and aesthetic strategies adopted to confront the social crisis of industrialism in the early nineteenth century.

Later in the essay, in response to the challenge provided by Foucauldian discourse theory, Habermas firmly asserts the normative dialectical promise of his conception of the liberal public sphere. For him, there is seemingly nothing wrong with the model that its own dynamic intellectual potential, expressed in his later theoretical project of ‘communicative action’, cannot correct:

Bourgeois publicness, in contrast, is articulated in discourses that provided areas of common ground not only for the labor movement but also for the excluded other, that is, the feminist movement. Contact with these movements in turn transformed these discourses and the structures of the public sphere itself. From the very beginning, the universalistic discourses of the bourgeois public sphere were based on self-referential premises; they did not remain unaffected by a criticism from within because they differ from Foucaultian discourses by virtue of their potential for self-transformation.¹³

This reassertion of the redemptive rational potential of his original model of the classical bourgeois public sphere perhaps reveals its greatest flaw. Some thirty years after the original publication of *Structural Transformation* Habermas stubbornly clings to a model of transcendental rationality that disavows a role for competing public spheres and competing cultural subjectivities. It is this inherent idealism in the Habermasian model of the public sphere that is constructively challenged by the revisionist work of Geoff Eley, Nancy Fraser and Craig Calhoun.

Widening the Public Sphere: Some Critical Revisions of the Habermasian Model

The Germanist and cultural historian Geoff Eley’s contribution to the landmark 1989 conference at which Habermas made these comments, published in 1992 as ‘Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century’, usefully contextualizes and challenges Habermas’s original model.¹⁴ In this influential essay, Eley synthesizes some of the important works of British cultural history that have appeared since

the original publication of *Structural Transformation* to articulate a revised model of the public sphere that allows for the privileging of contestative counter-discourses. Unlike other Anglo-American academics, Eley's refinements of the Habermasian model are representative of an ongoing engagement with the thesis of *Structural Transformation* that predates its English translation in 1989.¹⁵ By assimilating the work of John Brewer, J.H. Plumb and Raymond Williams, amongst others, Eley focuses on the development in the eighteenth century of the modern reading public and its diversification within a larger movement of popular literacy.¹⁶ He also contextualizes Habermas's implicit native assumptions concerning the rise of a liberal bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Germany from little known German historical sources.¹⁷ It is this clarification that provides the basis for his larger revision and challenge of Habermas's bourgeois model of the public sphere.

Habermas's intellectually heroic bourgeoisie from *Structural Transformation* emerge as a universal class, and Eley examines their social identity in the context of the institutional assumptions of the emergent bourgeois civil society in eighteenth-century Germany. Eley describes the form and quality of bourgeois associationism that enabled its intellectual participants to think of themselves as both progressive and representative:

Put simply, voluntary association was in principle the logical form of bourgeois emancipation and bourgeois self-affirmation.... the ideal and practice of association were explicitly hostile, by organization and intent, to older principles of corporate organization, which ascribed social place by hereditary and legal estate... sociologically, associationism reflected the growing strength and density of the social, personal, and family ties among the educated and propertied bourgeoisie (*Bildung und Besitz*). It described a public arena where the dominance of the bourgeoisie would naturally run. It was the constitutive organizational form of a new force for cultural and political change, namely, the natural social power and self-consciously civilized values of a bourgeoisie starting to see itself as a general or universal class.¹⁸

Although describing the social milieu of the liberal German bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, Eley may as well be describing the Enlightenment literati of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Edinburgh, with their many self-legitimizing forms of association in debating societies, salons and university classrooms. Eley continues his description by

emphasizing the very bourgeois notion of publicness embodied in this dynamic new class of European capitalism:

... voluntary association was the primary context of expression for bourgeois aspirations to the general leadership of nineteenth century society ... In this context the underlying principles of bourgeois life—economic, social, moral—were publicly acted out and consciously institutionalized into a model for the other classes, particularly the petty bourgeoisie and the working class, who became the objects of philanthropic support and cultural edification.¹⁹

This account suggests that the self-confidence of Habermas's bourgeois liberal public sphere masked some very authoritarian assumptions—at best paternalistic and at worst reactionary—towards competing cultural networks outside their own social bases.

Eley begins his revision of Habermas's bourgeois model of the public sphere by explicitly acknowledging the constricted cultural and social focus found in *Structural Transformation*. He notes that the exclusivity of Habermas's normative model of discourse disregards alternative intellectual and political networks from the period which, in their own respective contexts, provided collective bases for rational public criticism:

Basically, Habermas confines his discussion too much to the bourgeoisie ... The virtue of publicness could materialize other than by the intellectual transactions of a polite and literate bourgeois milieu. Despite the best efforts of the latter precisely to appropriate such a function to itself and to establish exclusive claims on the practice of reason, 'private people putting reason to use' could also be found elsewhere.²⁰

Eley makes three important points that constructively challenge and complicate Habermas's model of the classical liberal public sphere, each of which relates specifically to the bourgeois/plebeian comparative dynamic I am attempting to trace in the context of early nineteenth century Britain.

Eley's first point relates to the nature of the intellectual affiliation of non-bourgeois publics of the late eighteenth century, including their participation in the political, cultural and economic upheavals of modernity. He writes:

The liberal desideratum of reasoned exchange also became available for nonbourgeois, subaltern groups, whether the radical intelligentsia of

Jacobinism and its successors or wide sections of social classes like the peasantry or the working class. In both literary terms (the production and circulation/diffusion of ideas) and political terms (the adoption of constitutions and liberties under the law) the global ideological climate encouraged peasant and working-class voters to strive for the same emancipatory language.²¹

Rather than completely disavowing the normative value of Habermas's model of the public sphere, Eley instead seeks to open it up to include social and cultural movements neglected in the original account. It is instructive to note the way in which Eley interprets the cultural changes of modernity in late eighteenth-century Britain to identify the development of distinctive critical discourses:

... the positive values of the liberal public sphere quickly acquired broader democratic resonance, with the resulting emergence of impressive popular movements, each with its own distinctive movement cultures (i.e., form of public sphere) ... There is enough evidence from the literature of Owenism, Chartism, and British popular politics ... to take this argument seriously.²²

Indeed, the journals I am examining from the plebeian public sphere, *The Black Dwarf* and *Political Register* in particular, responded to the social transformations of the period in distinctively radical ways that more readily exemplified Habermas's later concept of 'communicative action', in contrast to the increasingly internalized dialectic of bourgeois cultural criticism worked out in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, the journals of the plebeian public sphere used the polemical tradition of cultural discourse from such seventeenth-century movements as the Levellers as a distinctive model for their critical practice. This unique pamphleteering discourse forms an entirely distinctive critical tradition from that of the morally didactic reviews that so influenced the critical development of the leading journals in the bourgeois public sphere.²³ This highlights the most problematic aspect of Habermas's model of the public sphere from *Structural Transformation*: it denied a communicative rationality to any but the most elite of bourgeois intellectual circles. As Eley writes of this simplistic schema: 'In particular, Habermas's oppositions simply don't work, because (as we shall see) the liberal public sphere was faced at the very moment of its appearance by not only a "plebeian" public that

was disabled and easily suppressed but also a radical one that was combative *and* highly literate.’²⁴ I do not share Eley’s distinction between an easily suppressed plebeian public and a more articulate (and more bourgeois) radical one in the early nineteenth century. The plebeian public sphere was a cultural formation that challenged conventional notions of literacy. I have been influenced by the conclusions of scholars of the period like James Epstein, Patricia Anderson and Iain McCalman whose work suggests that a complex popular culture involved both the literate and the semi-literate alike in the circulation and dissemination of printed images.²⁵ Recognizing this complexity is a fundamental prerequisite to a proper comparative study of cultural criticism in the pre-Victorian British public sphere.

Eley’s second point deals with the profound impact the French Revolution had on the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century. I suggest in chapter four that the trajectory of British radical journalism preceded that of the international Jacobin movements of the 1790s; however, I also recognize that the French Revolution did provide a wider cultural backdrop of resistance that inspired many contemporary British examples. The explicitly political orientation of the radical and plebeian public spheres during the Jacobin period—with the former usually providing an organizational basis for the latter— was in part related to the radical movements across the channel: ‘The French experience bequeathed a political vocabulary in which such new aspirations could be engaged, a structured ideological discourse of rights and self-government into which such emergent intelligentsias might naturally insert themselves.’²⁶ Indeed, it is important to recall that the new radical plebeian public sphere being shaped in the 1790s in Britain had both a native polemical tradition and indigenous examples of popular political mobilization to draw upon. As I argue in chapter four, it was the radical pamphleteering of the English revolutionary period and the popular cultural expression of the Wilkites in the 1760s that were key influences on the cultural politics of the plebeian public sphere. But it is true, as Eley here

implies, that its maturity as a culturally cohesive public sphere did not begin to take shape until the Jacobin period of the 1790s.

It was at this particular period that some of the fundamental institutional characteristics began to develop which would distinguish radical plebeian discourse from that of its elitist bourgeois rival. Eley remarks of this cultural divergence taking shape between the bourgeois and radical plebeian public spheres:

Armed with the new political consciousness, they set about constituting a national public sphere in all the ways discussed above ... but with the crucial differences: it was stimulated from the outside rather than being the spontaneous outgrowth of indigenous social development, in response to backwardness rather than progress, and it was consciously expansive rather than narrowly restrictive, oriented towards proselytizing among the people rather than closing ranks against them.²⁷

This last point becomes pivotal when comparing the distinctive reactions of the journals in this study to the social crisis of industrialism. While the criticism of the *Edinburgh Review* retreated into a kind of idealist haven from which to interpret the social turbulence and cultural dissonance of the early nineteenth century, the plebeian public sphere produced increasingly articulate, and politically radical, responses to these same events, culminating in the mass mobilizations of the postwar Radical movement. This distinction represents a new historicization of the Habermasian notion of communicative rationality. Rather than emerging from a specific notion of bourgeois subjectivity, I argue that a truly progressive communicative action was achieved during this period by journals at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum. This also explicitly challenges the pessimistic trajectory of Habermas's general thesis in the second half of *Structural Transformation*. In this much neglected second part of the study Habermas decries the loss of normative intellectual authority that accompanied the public sphere's increasing 'massification'.²⁸ I argue that in the specific context of the early nineteenth century, rather than losing its radical communicative potential through an expansion of its social base, the plebeian public sphere actually increased its critical authority.

Eley's final point underlines the contested nature of Habermas's public sphere model. Eley recognizes the ideological contradictions in Habermas's bourgeois model when confronted by an alternative, popular and radical discourse from below. He suggests Habermas 'both idealizes its bourgeois character (by neglecting the ways in which its elitism blocked and consciously repressed possibilities of broader participation/emancipation) and ignores alternative sources of emancipatory impulse in popular radical traditions (such as the dissenting traditions studied by Edward Thompson and Christopher Hill).'²⁹ This observation reminds us that Habermas's classical bourgeois public sphere—far from being a fleeting example of normative discourse in an otherwise degenerating communicative environment—always existed in conflict with competing modes of social and cultural criticism. Rather than disavow the concept of normativity embedded within Habermas's original narrative, this study aims to seek out alternative sites of normative social criticism in the early nineteenth-century public sphere. This revisionist project is aided by Eley's valuable insights here and helps in my attempt to recuperate the Habermasian model as a flexible conceptual framework from which to analyze general and specific instances of intellectual and cultural conflict: 'Consequently, the public sphere makes more sense as the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place, rather than as the spontaneous and class-specific achievement of the bourgeoisie in some sufficient sense.'³⁰

Eley's revision of the bourgeois model of the public sphere uncovers the social and cultural complexity that was either ignored or bracketed in Habermas's original formulation. For such a historically specific concept this revision serves as a basic precondition to any extended application of the Habermasian model; especially one that seeks to locate differentiated socio-historical traditions of cultural discourse. Indeed, I would argue that acknowledging the idealization embedded within the original concept may enable its normative value to be recovered, albeit in a more complicated and fragmented form. The intellectuals and the readers that made up the bourgeois public sphere described

by Habermas were historical players in an often turbulent social and cultural landscape, as well as discrete examples of Enlightenment rationality. This paradox is articulated by Eley near the end of his essay:

...the participants in the bourgeois public always faced two ways in this sense: forward in confrontation with the old aristocratic and royal authorities, but also backward against the popular/plebeian elements already in pursuit. We can't grasp the ambiguities of the liberal departure—the consolidation of the classical public sphere in the period, say, between 1780 and 1850—without acknowledging the fragility of the liberal commitments and the element of contestation in this sense.³¹

It is a central aim of this study to trace the specific cultural strands of this contestation.

The radical political theorist and feminist social philosopher Nancy Fraser continues this necessary interrogation of the Habermasian model of the public sphere in a pair of essays, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy' and 'Politics, Culture and the Public Sphere: Toward a Postmodern Conception'.³² Taken together these interventions contribute to a uniquely radical, feminist and postmodern revision of the original Habermasian model outlined in *Structural Transformation*.

Fraser begins her analysis in 'Rethinking the Public Sphere' by acknowledging the conceptual significance of the Habermasian model to contemporary cultural theory, while at the same time pointing to its basic limitations as a normative basis for critique. She writes: 'If you grant me that the general idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical theory, then I shall go on to argue that the specific form in which Habermas has elaborated this idea is not wholly satisfactory.'³³ According to Fraser, only with a thorough revision can the critical value of the public sphere be recovered: '... I contend that his analysis of the public sphere needs to undergo some critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield a category capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy.'³⁴ Like Eley, Fraser contends that the original model contained some fundamental exclusions that compromise the progressive rhetoric used to justify its normative value.³⁵ Perhaps more

relevant to the comparative aspect of this study, Fraser asserts that the bourgeois model Habermas describes actually creates a kind of ‘double hegemony’ over any competing models by both exclusively defining the basis of a universal communicative rationality as well as denying to other forms of cultural discourse any normative critical basis. She writes of this particularly Habermasian paradox:

It is a measure of the eventual success of this bourgeois project that these norms later became hegemonic, sometimes imposed on, sometimes embraced by, broader segments of the society... There is a remarkable irony here, one that Habermas’s account of the rise of the public sphere fails fully to appreciate. A discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction.³⁶

Fraser rightly questions the ideological validity of Habermas’s notion of a liberal public sphere that defines the parameters for acceptable critical discourse in an essentially self-referential manner. She argues that different publics, existing at the very start of Habermas’s historical schema in the eighteenth century, drew on their own cultural styles, idioms and referents to define distinctive notions of communicative rationality: ‘Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech.’³⁷ Indeed, from the new form of popular subjectivity invoked by the Leveller manifesto in the mid-seventeenth century, to the subversive cultural politics of popular iconography created by the Wilkite petitioners a century later, and through to the directed radical discourse of the London Corresponding Society at the end of the eighteenth century, a rich history of alternatively organized oppositional discourse has existed to challenge the hegemonic forms of liberal bourgeois rationality outlined by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*. Any progressive critical application of the Habermasian model must come to terms with its fundamental historical and cultural myopia concerning the rich counter-cultural history of communicative praxis in modern Britain.

Fraser not only seeks to uncover the hidden ideological bias of the liberal model of the public sphere, but also to emphasize the normative value of the distinctive vernacular

discourses produced by competing publics. This revision renders Habermas's universal model based on a kind of 'ultimate rational consensus' deeply problematic. Like Eley, Fraser seeks a theoretical framework that highlights competing and conflictual notions of cultural discourse. Because the post-feudal European states Habermas uses as cultural models were deeply circumscribed by class, gender and racial divisions and hierarchies, only a revised model that accommodates this notion of conflict and plurality is acceptable.³⁸ I follow the Romantic period scholar Kevin Gilmartin in arguing that the radical plebeian publics represented by journals like Cobbett's *Political Register* and T.J. Wooler's *The Black Dwarf* correspond to Fraser's idea of a 'counter-public'.³⁹ Fraser suggests her pluralist model of communicative space in order to more accurately reflect the contested nature of public debate in these socially circumscribed contexts: 'I contend that in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public.'⁴⁰ This point is highly relevant for a study that seeks to trace the relationship of Britain's emerging cultural and intellectual institutions in the public sphere with the broader political and social debates in the early nineteenth century. Fraser settles on the idea of 'subaltern counterpublics' as her fundamental revision to the original Habermasian model: 'I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.'⁴¹

I am arguing in this study that the critical discourse that emerged from the plebeian public sphere foregrounded economic distress, political injustice and a didactic cultural populism in a manner which closely approximates Fraser's idea of a counterpublic sphere. Fraser sees the conflictual dynamic intrinsic to any broadly defined model of the public sphere as an inevitable consequence of the fact that distinct cultural discourses engender deeply divergent political strategies: 'These institutions may be understood as culturally

specific rhetorical lenses that filter and alter the utterances they frame; they can accommodate some expressive modes and not others.’⁴² It is one of the guiding assumptions of this study that only through a comparative examination of the wider contexts and institutions of cultural production in the early nineteenth century can a normative basis be established for alternative forms of critical discourse.

In Fraser’s other substantial revision of the Habermasian model, ‘Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere: Toward a Postmodern Conception’, she highlights primary issues of gender and class inequality to argue for a postmodern, postliberal and pluralized conception of the public sphere. Habermas’s model as outlined in *Structural Transformation* gives deliberative modes of rationality priority over more active, polemical modes of critical discourse. Fraser suggests that in a society laced with inequalities—with cultural expression merely being one, albeit highly visible aspect of this wider political predicament—any politically valid consensus can be provisional at best and achieved through means that reflect this basic social reality. This would carry over into the communicative strategies used by different publics: ‘Once we acknowledge this, however, we must modify the modern liberal view that treats deliberation as the privileged mode of public-sphere interaction. Relations among differentially empowered publics in stratified societies are more likely to be *contestatory* than deliberative.’⁴³ This observation is highly relevant in a study that seeks to uncover the differentiated strategies of critical discourse employed by bourgeois and plebeian publics in reaction to the social conflicts of the early nineteenth century.

Fraser’s conception of a postmodern public sphere is useful primarily as a vehicle for recognizing the value of a differentiated idea of critical discourse, while still embracing the normative aspirations of the Habermasian model. This revision extends to the notion of what can be understood to be ‘private’ or ‘public’, despite the persistent attempts in bourgeois cultural discourse to apply boundaries to these spheres for political reasons of its own. For Fraser this strict division between ‘private’ and ‘public’ in the Habermasian

public sphere is primarily a by-product of the masculinist ideology that inhibits different voices from gaining access to the social platform that Habermas's model valorizes. Her extended definition of a postmodern public sphere is worth quoting in full, in order to grasp the fundamental ways in which it differs from Habermas's original bourgeois model:

A postmodern conception of the public sphere can be a powerful instrument of cultural criticism. For one thing, it can render visible the ways in which social inequality taints deliberation within existing publics in late capitalist societies. For another, it can show how inequality affects relations among different publics in such societies, how various publics are differentially empowered or segmented, and how some are involuntarily enclaved and subordinated. Finally, a postmodern conception of the public sphere can expose ways in which the labeling of some issues and interests as 'private' limits the range of problems, and of approaches to problems, that can be widely contested in contemporary societies. Unlike the modern liberal conception, then, it can be genuinely critical of contemporary politics and culture.⁴⁴

I would argue that Fraser's postmodern conception of the public sphere can 'be genuinely critical of contemporary politics and culture' by taking into account these key issues of subjectivity and positionality, while still allowing the original model a key role to play in the contemporary practice of cultural theory and cultural history. Perhaps it is ironic, then, that this revised model of the public sphere comes nearest to achieving Habermas's later theoretical goal of a model of communication freed from the distortion produced by the socially oppressive institutional pressures of advanced capitalism.⁴⁵

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider from an explicitly feminist perspective the comparative benefits and limitations of the respective plebeian and bourgeois models of the public sphere. It should be acknowledged that in a variety of ways plebeian counterpublics were in fact more regressive cultural spaces for the development of female subjectivity in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁶ As Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff have detailed in their important study, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (1987), there were opportunities for female participation in the bourgeois model of the public sphere that clearly were not replicated in its plebeian counterpart.⁴⁷ These ranged from the participation of middle class women in forms of the

bourgeois public sphere like the private salon, the philanthropic society and the voluntary association, to other directed forms of cultural consumption made available in the expanding market in prose fiction which often highlighted a discourse of ‘feminine sensibility’. In particular, as the introduction to a recent anthology of women’s criticism attests, the cultural space of the literary salon gave women of the high bourgeoisie and nobility in early modern Europe a decisive role in shaping the modern institutions of critical discourse:

... perhaps the earliest institution of criticism on the European continent was created as the province of women. A border space between private and public life, the salon culture that first developed in seventeenth-century France constituted women as arbiters of taste and enablers of literary fortune and provided in mid-eighteenth century England an alternative to such men-only spaces as the coffeehouses.⁴⁸

The prominent Habermasian and feminist political philosopher Seyla Benhabib has gone so far to suggest that ‘the salons are spaces dominated by female presence’.⁴⁹ There were no such correlating cultural spaces for the entrance of women in the rival plebeian public sphere. Throughout its historical development the plebeian model of critical discourse — whether in its physical spaces of the tavern, radical meeting, or workplace, or in its discursive spaces of the radical pamphlet, manifesto, broadside, or periodical — only allowed women a very minor role.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the cultural agenda of discourse in the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century often reinforced passive roles for working-class women as idealized keepers of a lost domestic moral economy, or worse, excluded the female audience entirely in its valorization of a heroic, male-dominated pre-industrial culture of collective resistance to an ascendant commercial ideology. This brief excursus is not intended to be a considered examination of female subjectivity in the comparative models of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres. Rather, it merely suggests that a comparative examination of the British public sphere which takes gender rather than class as its organizing problematic would, it is safe to say, come up with decidedly different results than those in this study.

Both Fraser and Eley's substantial revisions of the original model of the liberal bourgeois public sphere portrayed in *Structural Transformation* greatly aid my attempt to historically reconstruct a comparative dynamic within the British public sphere. However, it is the American historian and sociologist Craig Calhoun who has most comprehensively engaged with the Habermasian model for the purposes of furthering the contemporary project of critical social theory. It is to this ambitious work of theoretical revision that I now turn.

Both in his introductory essay in the 1992 critical collection *Habermas and the Public Sphere* and in his full-length study *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (1995), Calhoun sees in Habermas's seminal work an opportunity to move past the ideological limitations associated with the bourgeois public sphere to promote a more agency-driven and multicultural political agenda.⁵¹ In the introductory essay, 'Habermas and the Public Sphere', Calhoun eschews the political pessimism of the conclusion to *Structural Transformation*, and instead stresses the latent emancipatory potential of the Habermasian model of the public sphere. Calhoun argues that this dialectical aspect 'informs not just his definition but his whole approach, inasmuch as he attempts to recover the enduringly valuable ideal of the bourgeois public sphere from its historically partial realization'.⁵² Calhoun's revisionist project seeks to highlight different aspects of Habermas's model for politically transformative ends.

An important part of this project is to emphasize the fundamental impact that social movements have had on the development of the public sphere. Resisting the Kantian notion of a discrete, idealized and tacitly elitist intellectual arena for public debate that animates the Habermasian model, Calhoun insists that only through a combination of active social, cultural and political engagement can the dialectical normative potential of Habermas's model be realized:

... movements are crucial to reorienting the agenda of public discourse, bringing new issues to the fore. The routine rational-critical discourse of the

public sphere cannot be about everything all at once... Throughout the modern era, social movements have been in part occasions for the legitimation of new voices (by which I mean not just the inclusion of persons previously excluded but also changes in the identities from which included persons speak). The absence of social movements from Habermas's account thus also reflects an inattention to agency, to the struggles by which both the public sphere and its participants are actively made and remade.⁵³

By highlighting the social and political struggle obscured in Habermas's original conception of the public sphere, Calhoun contributes to the mapping of a radical plebeian model. As he suggests, the single greatest limitation in the Habermasian model of the public sphere is to be found in its neglect of the contested relationships that constituted cultural exchange between the bourgeois public sphere and its more radical, plebeian rival: 'throughout its existence the bourgeois public sphere was permeated by demands from below... The hegemony of bourgeois publicity was always incomplete and exercised within a field constituted partly by its relation to other insurgent discourses.'⁵⁴

Later in the essay Calhoun suggests that the pessimistic second half of *Structural Transformation* altered Habermas's subsequent critical project from that of a historically specific attempt to construct an institutionalized space in which to confront the deformities of post-Enlightenment modernity, to one increasingly abstracted and redirected to the establishment of a purely interpersonal communicative rationality. However, as Calhoun demonstrates, Habermas has not entirely abandoned the normative socio-critical idea that the public sphere represents; instead he has sought a more universal—and it must be said, abstract—basis for its expression:

...Habermas has not surrendered the idea of immanent critique. Rather, he has removed the immanence from specific historical conditions to universal characteristics of human communication. This allows him to ground his normative argument, to keep it from arbitrariness, but it removes it from any clear purchase on historical progress.⁵⁵

As Calhoun here suggests, merely expanding the narrow social basis of the classical liberal public sphere can constitute only one part of a theoretically informed cultural history; any revisionist study informed by Habermas's still valuable theoretical framework must also

attempt to bridge the entrenched epistemological divisions that define the contemporary academic practice of critical theory.

In *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History and the Challenge of Difference*, Calhoun attempts a comprehensive explication of this revised multicultural and politically active public sphere derived from, yet constantly in tension with, Habermas's classical bourgeois model. Calhoun grounds his own revisionist theoretical project in a radical Anglo-American political and social vision. By focusing on the ruptures and conflicts that constitute a basic part of the tradition of social theory he is outlining in *Critical Social Theory*, he provides a sound theoretical basis for adapting the Habermasian model of the public sphere to the fiercely polemical and politically radical tradition of British cultural criticism perpetuated by key plebeian intellectuals of the Romantic period like Thomas Spence, William Cobbett and T.J. Wooler. Perhaps even more pertinent to the overriding theoretical basis of my study, Calhoun locates the origins of his politically active project of critical social theory in the intellectual and moral struggles resulting from the human confrontation with the alienating forces of modernity. Calhoun's intellectual genealogy of social theory encompasses the cultural complexities associated with that transformative historical period of modernity beginning in the seventeenth century:

...the Enlightenment and early modern social thought generally were shaped extraordinarily deeply by the confrontation with difference. The attempt to construct universal truths or norms followed from the rupture in unquestioned, 'doxic' acceptance of traditions that constituted not multiple truths and commensurable values but simply Truth and Value. This rupture was one made not merely by science or capitalism or industrialization, but by a whole congeries of factors that brought Europeans into new relationships across lines of difference... Confrontations with difference were basic... to the mobilization of citizen armies, and the spread of printing and literacy. Ruptures in doxic assumptions and engagements across distances and differences brought the corresponding challenge of building relations recognizing both distinction and connection.⁵⁶

This concern with both difference and commonality is particularly relevant to a study of an ideologically fractured public sphere that diverged between rival traditions of social

criticism which were also culturally distinctive attempts at reconstructive totality in the wake of industrial modernity.

Calhoun develops his project of critical social theory in a manner that allows for the ‘prophetic’ intervention of cultural critics as political actors—a concept of intellectual hermeneutics first heralded by the radical African American moral philosopher Cornel West.⁵⁷ Calhoun recovers an activist dimension from neo-Marxist social theory through the Frankfurt School concept of immanent critique: ‘Critique was required as a tool for finding and heightening the tensions between the merely existent and its possibilities. For the first-generation Frankfurt School theorists, this meant especially that critical theory depended on a dialectical analysis of the contradictions internal to every epoch, or social formation, or situation, or text.’⁵⁸ From this neo-Hegelian perspective Calhoun creates space for a new interpretation of the history and development of British cultural criticism; one that acknowledges the divergent polemical/political and cultural/aesthetic strands of a critical tradition responding to an ostensibly universal social crisis. Further, Calhoun’s revision of Habermasian social theory is useful because it views these ‘diremptions’—or crises—as signaling opportunities for innovative intellectual interventions by figures who attempt to appeal to large and ideologically familiar publics for a wider legitimation of their critical interpretations.

This subjective aspect of Calhoun’s revised concept of critical social theory is significant in allowing intellectual mediators, whether as agitating polemicists or defensive cultural critics, to intervene creatively in social crises and develop their own distinctive cultural visions. As he explains, critical social theory enables its practitioners to fundamentally shape their own critical responses in ways that relate directly to the historic project of British cultural criticism: ‘Theory is not only a guide to action ... It is an aid in thinking through changed circumstances and new possibilities.’⁵⁹ This idea of critical subjectivity recalls the post-theological origins of modern cultural criticism, particularly in its prophetic and mediating aspects: ‘It helps practical actors deal with social change by

helping them to see beyond the immediacy of what is at any particular moment to conceptualize something of what could be.’⁶⁰ It is one of the primary concerns of this study to trace the ways in which this broad project of moral-intellectual intervention diverged into rival cultural discourses that endorsed equally distinctive political strategies.

Calhoun’s model of critical social theory brings together segregated intellectual developments into one coherent and politically active research methodology. This rescues cultural theory from its socially limiting positivistic notions of objectivity, systemization and specialization. Calhoun reminds us of the methodological flexibility and intellectual creativity that his new critical model requires: ‘As we work to develop a more complex cultural sociology, it will be only one of many cases in which the meaning of the basic objects we study is reconstituted by critical, theoretically informed reflection, historical and cultural analysis, and the effort to make better sense of as broad a range of empirical observation as we can.’⁶¹ By working within this broad model of critical social theory in my own study I hope to restore to the Habermasian model of the public sphere a historical relevance and political specificity abandoned by the German social philosopher in his later work.

Calhoun also developed a provisional theory of plebeian cultural praxis in an earlier study, *The Question of Class Struggle* (1982), that both overlaps with, and draws upon, the innovative critical methodology of cultural materialism devised by the late British Marxist cultural theorist, Raymond Williams.⁶² Calhoun’s thesis from that study argues for a new theoretical conception of the kind of plebeian cultural praxis detailed in E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*. He suggests the type of ‘reactionary radicalism’ pioneered in the writings of intellectuals like Cobbett in the early nineteenth century plebeian public sphere provided a powerful counter-hegemonic ideology in response to the synthesis of utilitarianism and idealism from the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere.⁶³ For the wider purposes of a study that seeks to uncover an oppositional tradition of materialist cultural criticism, this conception of plebeian cultural praxis is

extremely relevant: 'It [plebeian cultural experience] lacked a general conception of itself, but it did not lack specific, symbolically articulated conflicts with another cultural and social group that it did understand to be distinct, cohesive, and in opposition to its own (individually or communally understood) interests.'⁶⁴ This idea of an oppositional residual cultural formation was first worked out, in a more explicit theoretical context, by Raymond Williams. In the next chapter I shall examine the relevance of both Williams's theory of cultural materialism, and John B. Thompson's theory of symbolic interaction, to my study of 'symbolic cultural conflict' in the British public sphere.

NOTES

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 3.

² Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 27.

³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 4.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 32.

⁵ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 36.

⁶ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 36.

⁷ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 37.

⁸ Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 425.

⁹ Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 425.

¹⁰ Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 425. For the best recent comparative treatment of some of the nineteenth-century French and British popular movements that Habermas is referring to here, see Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 427.

¹² Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 35.

¹³ Habermas, 'Further Reflections on the Public Sphere', p. 429.

¹⁴ See Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 289-339.

¹⁵ See Geoff Eley, 'Re-thinking the Political: Social History and Political Culture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Britain', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 21 (1981), pp. 427-57; and David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 296.

¹⁷ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', pp. 296-98.

¹⁸ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 298.

¹⁹ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 298.

²⁰ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 304.

²¹ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 304. Eley here raises the issue of the intellectual identity of subaltern groups. For an influential discussion of these questions of intellectual representation and agency and how they relate to subaltern groups see Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in

Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

²² Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 304.

²³ For a highly illuminating study of the origins of bourgeois cultural discourse in the eighteenth century see Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 305.

²⁵ See Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld*.

²⁶ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 305.

²⁷ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 306.

²⁸ See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 159-222.

²⁹ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 306.

³⁰ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 306.

³¹ Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 321.

³² See Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 109-42; and Nancy Fraser, 'Politics, culture, and the public sphere: toward a postmodern conception', in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. by Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 287-312.

³³ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 111.

³⁴ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 111.

³⁵ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 113.

³⁶ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 115.

³⁷ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 116.

³⁸ In *Structural Transformation* Habermas essentially locates the cultural development of the liberal public sphere within a broader process of social transformation. The newly privatized public spaces of Western Europe in the eighteenth century replaced the feudal system of 'representative publicness' in which the public sphere was merely an extension of the status of the nobility. See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 5-26.

³⁹ See Kevin Gilmartin, 'Introduction: locating a plebeian counterpublic sphere', in *Print Politics*, pp. 1-10.

⁴⁰ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 122.

⁴¹ Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 123.

⁴² Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 126.

⁴³ Fraser, 'Politics, culture, and the public sphere', p. 292.

⁴⁴ Fraser, 'Politics, culture, and the public sphere', pp. 295-96.

⁴⁵ See Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); and *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vols. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Polity, 1984; 1987).

⁴⁶ There has been another less influential and more explicitly conservative feminist treatment of the Habermasian model by the prominent Romanticist Ann Mellor in which she argues for the idea of a 'counter-public sphere', borrowed from Rita Felski, centred around the reading practices and morally didactic writings of middle-class women in the early nineteenth century. Mellor's conservative feminist conception of a counter-public sphere privileges the actions of domestic females as political interventions into the larger world of male dominated public discourse. Her largely textualist explication of this counter-public sphere fails to engage closely with the original Habermasian model, or with any of the larger issues of class-based discourse explored in this study. See Ann Mellor, 'Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), pp. 559-67; and Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1989). For a more complex analysis of the role of gender in the construction of public subjectivity that takes issue with this 'domestic thesis', see Lawrence Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions About Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29 (1993), pp. 97-109.

⁴⁷ See especially the chapter "'Improving Times": Men, Women and the Public Sphere', in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 416-49.

⁴⁸ The Folger Collective on Early Women Critics, 'Introduction', in *Women Critics, 1660-1820: An Anthology*, ed. by the Folger Collective on Early Women Critics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. xv.

⁴⁹ See Seyla Benhabib, 'The Salons as Female "Public Sphere"', in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 14-22 (p. 19).

⁵⁰ Women did emerge as a dissident presence in the early nineteenth-century radical tavern, but only in the form of sexual outlaws. Indeed, Iain McCalman argues in his influential study *Radical Underworld* that criminal activities—often of a sexual nature—in certain 'ultra' London taverns constituted a fundamental part of the radical culture of the period. It needs to be pointed out that women were just as often the objects of such activity in the 'radical underworld'—in the forms of prostitution and modeling for pornographic prints—as they were the subjects of independent action. See *Radical Underworld*, p. 2.

⁵¹ Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); and 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 1-48.

⁵² Calhoun, 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', p. 4.

⁵³ Calhoun, 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', p. 4.

⁵⁴ Calhoun, 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', p. 39.

⁵⁵ Calhoun, 'Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere', p. 40.

⁵⁶ Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, p. xx-xxi.

⁵⁷ See Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) p. 11.

⁵⁸ Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, p. 9.

⁶¹ Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory*, p. 65.

⁶² See Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism During the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

⁶³ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, pp. 7-10.

⁶⁴ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 17.

Chapter Two

Towards A Theory of Symbolic Cultural Conflict in the British Public Sphere

This chapter will continue the theoretical overview initiated in chapter one with a discussion of two key models of cultural theory. Raymond Williams's theory of cultural materialism advances the study of the British public sphere with its materialization of cultural practices and its location of patterns of emergent, dominant and residual cultural formations. John B. Thompson's theorization of the media likewise maps out the symbolic power of social criticism in its discursive confrontations with the cultural process of modernity. Thompson's theory of symbolic interaction also provides a more theoretically rigorous explanation for the kind of intellectual practice in the early nineteenth century public sphere detailed by the literary historian Jon Klancher in his study *The Making of English Reading Audiences*.¹ Both approaches help to integrate Habermas's more recent efforts at theorizing the role of the public sphere in the construction of the cultural 'lifeworld' of modernity—a key restatement of his earlier description of Enlightenment rationality from *Structural Transformation*.

In his 1971 article for *New Left Review*, 'Literature and Sociology', and in his later full-length study, *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams sought to synthesize the moralistic Leavisite response to the crisis of modernity found in the dominant British tradition of literary criticism with the more abstract and structurally sophisticated analysis of Continental neo-Marxist cultural theory.² In particular Williams was influenced by the unorthodox Marxist 'genetic' structuralism of Lucien Goldmann in that thinker's explicitly theoretical attempts at finding meaning in the collective and everyday appropriations of philosophy, art and literature.³ As Williams begins to outline his project of cultural materialism, its relevance for any study of cultural politics in the public sphere becomes immediately apparent:

A Marxist cultural sociology is then recognizable, in its simplest outlines, in studies of different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and in the linking of these within whole social material processes... Thus distribution ... is ... connected, specifically, to modes of production and then interpreted as the active formation of readerships and audiences, and of the characteristic social relations, including economic relations, within which particular forms of cultural activity are in practice carried out.⁴

A cultural materialist approach is a significant aid in negotiating basic questions of agency in a particular cultural context. Significantly, Williams's theory allows for the possibility of both an active and collective cultural engagement with the processes of modern social and historical development; a development that is constantly being modified dialectically by the interaction between various oppositional and hegemonic cultural forces. Much like the broader Habermasian project of critical social theory, Williams's cultural materialism also articulates a wider ethical vision of modernity related to its immediate critical practice. Williams writes of this larger aspiration contained within his cultural theory: 'just as the deformation could be understood, at its roots, only by historical analysis of a particular kind of economy, so the attempt to overcome and surpass it lay not in isolated witness or in separated activity but in practical work to find, to assert and to establish more human social ends in more human political and economic means'.⁵

In *Marxism and Literature* Williams defines the Arnoldian concept of 'Culture' with specific reference to its relationship to historical materialism. Particularly useful for the comparative purposes of this study, Williams locates the active critical use of the term in a specific period of social crisis amongst two very distinct intellectual traditions. In this he touches on the differing ways the concept is deployed in the respective cultural-critical projects of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres:

The two decisive responses of a modern kind were, first, the idea of culture, offering a different sense of human growth and development, and second, the idea of socialism, offering a social and historical criticism of and alternative to 'civilization' and 'civil society' as fixed and achieved conditions. The extensions, transfers, and overlaps between all these shaping modern concepts,

and between them and residual concepts of much older kinds, have been quite exceptionally complex.⁶

This description throws into sharp relief the dialectic that existed between the respective cultural discourses developing in both bourgeois and plebeian criticism of the early nineteenth century. It is one of the central arguments of this study that between an internalized, idealist conceptualization of 'Culture' and an externalized, materialist one, two very different strategies of intellectual resistance are developed.

Williams first describes the ideologically dominant concept of 'Culture' with specific reference to its origins in a privileged bourgeois subjectivity:

The difficulty was ordinarily negotiated by relating 'culture', even where it was evidently social in practice, to the 'inner life' in its most accessible, secular forms: 'subjectivity', 'the imagination', and in these terms 'the individual'. The religious emphasis weakened, and was replaced by what was in effect a metaphysics of subjectivity and the imaginative process. 'Culture', or more specifically 'art' and 'literature' (themselves newly generalized and abstracted), were seen as the deepest record, the deepest impulse, and the deepest resource of the 'human spirit'.⁷

This notion of 'Culture' was deployed defensively to differentiate a specific intellectual tradition from the pressures of mass industrial capitalism and its philosophical counterpart, Benthamite Utilitarianism.⁸ In opposition to this bourgeois idea of 'Culture', Williams proposes the externalized and anthropological concept of culture as representative of 'a whole way of life'. Williams writes of this alternative usage: 'It became also a noun of general processes, specialized to its presumed configuration in "whole ways of life."⁹ This social sense of the term correlates with the radical cultural criticism emerging out of the plebeian public sphere in the early nineteenth century. From William Cobbett's 'materialist Arcadian' discourse in the *Political Register* to the protest literature coming from the pages of *The Black Dwarf*, this use of the concept of culture is a powerful symbolic opposition to the manifest social and economic injustices of urban industrial capitalism. Between the bourgeois-idealist interpretation of 'Culture' on the one hand, and the social-materialist conception on the other, we can more fully comprehend the

ideological divergence in British social criticism.¹⁰ As Williams writes of this seemingly permanent fracture in the modern tradition of cultural criticism: ‘Each tendency is ready to deny any proper use of the concept to the other, in spite of many attempts at reconciliation.’¹¹ Indeed, it is this historically produced cultural schism that Williams’s necessarily synthetic theory of cultural materialism in part seeks to close, or at least negotiate and traverse.

Williams’s revision of the orthodox Marxist conception of base and superstructure relates to his overall project of an activist theory of cultural practice and research. He argues that culture is more problematically related to economic conditions than conservative Marxist analysis will allow. The dominant interpretations of modern society in the orthodox Marxist tradition ignores the complex interrelationship between cultural formations and patterns of economic development: ‘What is fundamentally lacking, in the theoretical formulations of this important period, is any adequate recognition of the indissoluble connections between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity, and consciousness.’¹² This revision of the base/superstructure relationship in the theory of cultural materialism enables a much deeper appreciation of the practices of intellectuals within their respective cultural institutions, or public spheres. As dynamic cultural actors they can both reflect and creatively confront the dominant social consensus. As Williams shows, this more flexible consideration of the relationship between culture and society allows for direct, individual intellectual intervention: ‘It [society] is always also a constitutive process with very powerful pressures which are both expressed in political, economic and cultural formations and, to take the full weight of “constitutive”, are internalized and become “individual wills.”’¹³ A further extension of this cultural theory can be found in Williams’s analysis of the pivotal roles that traditions, institutions, and formations play in the evolution of modern societies. It is this aspect of his theory that contains perhaps the most relevant concept for the analysis of cultural history in its most

transformative stages. I am speaking of Williams's cultural hypothesis, 'structures of feeling'.¹⁴

This idea of 'structures of feeling' is particularly relevant to a study which seeks to trace the subtle shifts in ideological emphasis employed around the concept of 'Culture' during a period of unusual ideological volatility. Williams puts forth this concept not merely as a tool for illuminating the 'real lived experience' of cultural actors during some distant historical period, but as a practical methodology for analyzing forms of cultural production that reflect profound changes in social experience: 'The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures—which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming.'¹⁵ From the defensive social criticism of the *Edinburgh Review* to the aggressively polemical cultural politics employed by the *Political Register*, the Romantic period exhibited a highly differentiated—yet dialectically related—intellectual consciousness. Both modes of discourse were reacting against the emerging ideology of industrial capitalism in ways that relate to Williams's concept of hegemony here: 'The most interesting and difficult part of any cultural analysis, in complex societies, is that which seeks to grasp the hegemonic in its active and formative but also its transformational processes.'¹⁶ Indeed, early nineteenth-century Britain witnessed economic, social and cultural changes that made it a radically transformative episode in Western modernity.

Williams suggests that the radically transformative character of the period presents the scholarly observer of its cultural history with some specific problems of theory and methodology:

The major theoretical problem, with immediate effects on methods of analysis, is to distinguish between alternative and oppositional initiatives and contributions which are made within or against a specific hegemony... and other kinds of initiative and contribution which are irreducible to the terms of the original or the adaptive hegemony, and are in that sense independent. It can be persuasively argued that all or nearly all initiatives and contributions, even when they take on manifestly alternative or oppositional forms, are in

practice tied to the hegemonic: that the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture.¹⁷

I suggest that such an ideologically implicated cultural form in the period can be seen in the avant-garde movement of Romanticism. The leading Romantic cultural discourse of the early nineteenth century—of which Carlyle’s essay ‘Signs of the Times’ stands out as the most ambitious attempt at integrating into a coherent social philosophy—acted as a subjective internalization of the social crisis of industrial capitalism. Williams’s theoretical observations raise the crucial question of the extent to which the plebeian cultural criticism of the period, much of which was deeply conservative and backward looking in its reaction to mass industrial capitalism, also remains a mere extension of this larger hegemonic process.

For the purposes of larger comparative studies into the cultural production of the Romantic period, it is Williams’s theory of dominant, residual and emergent cultural formations that is perhaps most relevant. Williams argues that effective cultural historical analysis must account for the ‘complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance’.¹⁸ In my own comparative study this analysis will be achieved through an examination of some of the overlapping cultural themes apparent in the respective criticism from the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres. His notion of the residual similarly must be applied to discourses emerging from both spheres: ‘The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.’¹⁹ This relates very specifically to the rise of cultural criticism in the British public sphere during the social upheavals of the nineteenth century. I contend that this period engendered a bourgeois criticism that attempted to recreate internally the coherence found in the organic society of the pre-industrial age while producing a similar longing, articulated in more explicitly materialist terms, in plebeian criticism for a return to the ‘moral economy’ of a pre-capitalist civilization. In this sense

the plebeian notion of the culturally residual can be seen as both oppositional and politically radical. Of this Williams relates: ‘...the idea of rural community is predominantly residual, but it is in some limited respects alternative or oppositional to urban industrial capitalism...’²⁰ In his explication of the dialectics of emergent cultural formations, Williams anticipates the absorption of this radical discourse from the plebeian public sphere by the developing hegemonic cultural institutions of Victorian capitalism:

A new class is always a source of emergent cultural practice, but while it is still, as a class, relatively subordinate, this is always likely to be uneven and is certain to be incomplete... To the degree that it emerges, and especially to the degree that it is oppositional rather than alternative, the process of attempted incorporation significantly begins. This can be seen, in the same period in England, in the emergence and the effective incorporation of a radical popular press.²¹

However, seen dialectically, this emergent cultural formation of plebeian intellectual criticism, by foregrounding issues of equality, social justice and social morality, also acted to inform a long tradition of British political radicalism that ended with the founding of the Labour Party at the end of the nineteenth century.²²

Finally, in returning to Williams’s theoretical concept of ‘structures of feeling’, we can begin to appreciate the ultimate synthetic value of cultural materialism. This complex and subtle idea within Williams’s wider theoretical system perhaps requires some fleshing out before we consider the ways in which it can aid in the practice of contemporary cultural history. A ‘structure of feeling’ is both a methodological process and a distinctive set of cultural phenomena embedded within historical experience. At root the concept refers to the cultural changes that emerge through the interaction between emergent, residual and dominant ideologies. In that sense it is an attempt to both locate and isolate these cultural practices as articulations of ‘lived ideology’ during particularly transformative historical periods. ‘Structures of feeling’ also serve to represent the manner in which these cultural interactions come to influence the definition of a historical period. Williams writes of this: ‘For what we are defining is a particular quality of social experience and relationship,

historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period.’²³ As Williams explains, the experiential emphasis of ‘structures of feeling’ enables historical periods to remain open to a plurality of interpretations limited only by a respect for the ideological complexity of these cultural interactions in history: ‘The relations between this quality and the other specifying historical marks of changing institutions, formations, and beliefs, and beyond these the changing social and economic relations between and within classes, are again an open question: that is to say, a set of historical questions.’²⁴

With this crucial methodological concept Williams attempts to invest in the practice of cultural history a distinctively hermeneutical element that much orthodox historiography—as well as some important revisionist work—lacks. He suggests that the historian actively utilizing a cultural materialist approach must bring to his material a direct and imaginative intervention between the received interpretation of a particular period and the actual practical experience of its now silent cultural actors. Williams describes this conception of ‘practical consciousness’ as ‘what is actually being lived, and not only what it is thought is being lived...It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange.’²⁵ Williams’s concept directs the student of the history of modernity to seek out key episodes when collective intellectual assumptions and interpretations are crystallizing into both official and alternative ideologies and to create, as it were, some kind of tangible space for historical agency. The actual historical notion of ‘structures of feeling’ refers to a previously ignored set of social meanings and values as they relate to dominant, and often elitist, definitions of cultural experience: ‘It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (including historically variable), over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences.’²⁶ Williams’s notion of the complex

and differentiated relationship between elite and popular cultural forms—a more theoretical treatment of the dynamics played out within his earlier utopian notion of a ‘common culture’—provides a solid conceptual foundation for my analysis of the distinctive responses of bourgeois and plebeian cultural criticism to the universally experienced social crisis of modernity in the first third of the nineteenth century.²⁷

The idea of ‘structures of feeling’ further enables an active synthesis of certain key expressions of cultural consciousness from the time within a historically reconstructed intellectual and social context. Usefully, Williams’s conceptual basis includes precisely the kind of generational framework I seek to employ in this study: ‘Methodologically, then, a “structure of feeling” is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period, and needing always to be returned, interactively, to such evidence.’²⁸ Williams notes that his concept of ‘structures of feeling’ contains within it the assumption that certain cultural expressions and critical discourses change and mutate along with the social pressures applied to the class producing them:

At times the emergence of a new structure of feeling is best related to the rise of a class (England, 1700-60); at other times to contradiction, fracture, or mutation within a class (England, 1780-1830 or 1890-1930), when a formation appears to break away from its class norms, though it retains its substantial affiliation, and the tension is at once lived and articulated in radically new semantic figures.²⁹

I hope to illustrate this phenomenon by tracing the rise of a certain kind of cultural discourse in the British public sphere of the first third of the nineteenth century when new forms of criticism were developed out of the language and sensibility of aesthetic critique that belonged to an older, and increasingly displaced, cultural tradition.

Symbolic Cultural Practices in the British Public Sphere

Raymond Williams’s theory of cultural materialism allows for a more ideologically differentiated assessment of the cultural discourses that accompanied the social processes of

capitalist modernity in the nineteenth century. In John B. Thompson's *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (1995), the idea of the public sphere is critically examined with reference to some of the cultural manifestations of modernity like the reproduction of symbolic power and the role of the media in the changing nature of tradition and subjectivity.³⁰

Thompson's central thesis in *The Media and Modernity* remaps the development of modern communications, beginning with the advent of the printing press, both within, and as an instrumental part of, the broader cultural processes of modernity. From this perspective Thompson is able to view the subsequent growth of the mass media, including its impact on society, as fundamentally cultural processes. Thompson writes of this new media-centred approach to the study of cultural modernity: '... if we wish to understand the nature of modernity—that is of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them—then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact.'³¹ Like Habermas before him, Thompson develops a comprehensive social theory of communication and the media institutions that participate in what he terms 'symbolic formation'—the systematic reorganization of the symbolic character of social life. With this organizing theoretical concept he reviews the historical development of the mass media in early modern Europe, and in the process reinterprets the primary social and cultural transformations of modernity from the perspective of mediated interaction. Later in the study Thompson speculates about both the transformation and re-inscription of cultural traditions within the process of media development itself; a constructive theoretical synthesis that provides a functioning conceptual framework for the analysis of 'symbolic cultural conflict' that takes up the second part of this study.

Before embarking on a formal discussion of Thompson's social theory of the media I should perhaps clarify my meaning of this concept of 'symbolic cultural conflict'. I take as a starting point the definition outlined by Jon Klancher in his study *The Making of English Reading Audiences*. Describing the ideological transformation of cultural

production in England wrought by the French Revolution, Klancher articulates a provisional theory of cultural conflict undertaken in the periodicals of the day that would carry over into the polarization of critical discourse in the early nineteenth century public sphere: 'The fierceness of political conflict would be sublated into an extraordinary mental energy, accomplished and recognized in the periodicals themselves. The volcanic "moral earthquake" of the revolution... converted the moribund public discourse of the later eighteenth century into the "fertile soil" of the nineteenth century discursive field.'³² This new surrogate cultural battlefield provided the intellectuals in the Romantic period with clearly mapped-out spaces from which to engage in their ideological warfare. For the Spenceans and Radicals in the plebeian public sphere as much as for the middle-class intellectuals of the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, the French Revolution facilitated a fundamental redefinition of 'the political realm in terms of cultural practices' which included the reading habits, critical strategies of communication, and the creative adaptation of long standing epistemological assumptions to the deeply entrenched social problems of industrialism.³³ This period also saw the construction of a symbolic ideological boundary separating plebeian and bourgeois intellectuals that would fundamentally regulate the trajectory of critical discourse. The long years of ideological warfare before the final peace in 1815 thus set a general pattern for subsequent cultural and intellectual conflict. In my own conception of symbolic cultural practices, I am attempting to wed this provisional historical definition by Klancher to the more abstracted notion of symbolic power formation developed by Thompson.³⁴

In his introductory account of the relationship between the processes of communication and their material and social contexts, Thompson establishes the broad parameters of his social theory of the mass media. He stresses the overriding cultural nature of both the context and process of mediated interaction in modern societies: 'I shall develop an approach to the media which is fundamentally "cultural", by which I mean an approach which is concerned *both* with the meaningful character of symbolic forms *and*

with their social contextualization.’³⁵ Thompson’s social theory of the media lists four primary forms of power that set the framework for mediated interaction in modern societies: economic power; political power; coercive power; and symbolic power. His explanation of symbolic power is particularly crucial in illustrating the potentially transformative nature of criticism in the modern public sphere: ‘I shall use the term “symbolic power” to refer to this capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and indeed to create events, by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms.’³⁶ It is one of the central contentions of my thesis that the radical plebeian cultural criticism of the Romantic period maintained a distinctively polemical commitment to transforming power relations in society while its bourgeois counterpart retreated into a politically passive and highly aestheticized discourse chiefly directed to the ideological integration of its audience into the new cultural structures of mass industrial society.

Another relevant feature of Thompson’s social theory of the media is the emphasis he gives to the socially differentiated sites of reception involving these symbolic forms. He approaches this from a critical hermeneutical perspective that emphasizes the socially influenced nature of individual interpretation.³⁷ Thompson recognizes that different social groups receive symbolic forms largely in accordance with their specific cultural expectations: ‘But many of the assumptions and expectations that an individual brings to the process of interpretation are of a broader social and historical character. They are the common assumptions and expectations that are shared by a group of individuals who have broadly similar social origins and trajectories.’³⁸ Thus, the symbolic power of the social criticism coming from the radical plebeian public sphere in journals like the *Political Register* and *The Black Dwarf* differs substantially from the nature of the symbolic power found in the social criticism of the *Edinburgh Review*, in accordance with this larger social and historical process. This comparison highlights the importance of a fundamental aspect of cultural criticism often neglected by intellectual and literary historians of the period.

What has been missing in various interpretations of the cultural production from the Romantic period is the broader framework of reception that each cultural critic must engage with and react to in the process of their intellectual practice.

Thompson's social theory of the mass media differs most from classical social theory in its emphasis on the specifically mediated nature of cultural change and social transformation in modern societies. Moving away from the largely materialist orientation of much Marxist and Weberian social theory, Thompson argues instead that change in modern societies can most fruitfully be examined from the perspective of the media products themselves:

The argument I shall develop ... is that, by shifting the focus of attention, we can discern a broad transformation in the cultural domain which is both more systematic and clear-cut. If we focus in the first instance not on values, attitudes and beliefs, but rather on symbolic forms and their modes of production and circulation in the social world, then we shall see that, with the advent of modern societies in the late medieval and early modern periods, a systematic cultural transformation began to take hold ... Patterns of communication and interaction began to change in profound and irreversible ways ... By focusing on the activities and products of these organizations, and by examining the ways in which their products have been taken up and used by the individuals who received them, we can gain a firm hold on the cultural transformations associated with the rise of modern societies.³⁹

This theoretical approach supplements the Habermasian model of the public sphere in several important ways. It gives a transformative agency to the media products themselves—whether polemical manifestoes or reflective essays on society—while also respecting the transforming power of the social contexts in which these symbolic forms interact. This model is particularly useful when attempting to locate the specific social variables that often lay behind paradigmatic changes or divergences in intellectual practice. Tracing the different critical reactions to the major cultural and social events of the early nineteenth century in Britain requires a theoretical model that acknowledges the importance of cultural changes within media institutions themselves. This approach can help highlight the political character and social embeddedness of each modern media institution within the

larger public sphere, including the political effects of external structural transformations that influence the content produced by those media institutions.

The wider social transformation that is reflected in the cultural criticism in part two of this study is given crucial theoretical clarification by Thompson with his concept of the ‘re-mooring’ of tradition in mass mediated societies. By focusing on the relationship between tradition and the development of the media Thompson is able to explain the displacement of traditional cultural practices and the ways in which this manifests itself in the increasingly mediated worlds of modernity. Thompson argues that previously localized cultural practices that served a broadly normative function in society—like the community assembly or the debating club—were increasingly displaced by a more hermeneutical and individuated notion of tradition. With the decline of local face-to-face interaction in modern society, and with the corresponding sophistication of the print public sphere, cultural values and social phenomena became subject to an increasingly detached and self-conscious analysis. As Thompson explains: ‘The process of self-formation became more reflexive and open-ended, in the sense that individuals fell back increasingly on their own resources and on symbolic materials transmitted through the media to form coherent identities for themselves.’⁴⁰ This observation is crucial in tracing the affect that transformations in the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century had on an increasingly divergent tradition of cultural criticism. The split between a politically oriented social criticism emanating from the leading plebeian journals of the period, and a more self-conscious, aesthetically based critique of society in the bourgeois journals, can be explained through this theoretically expanded notion of tradition described by Thompson:

... material handed down from the past can serve as a normative guide in the sense that certain practices can be traditionally grounded, that is, grounded or justified by reference to tradition. This is a stronger sense of normativity precisely because the grounds for action are made explicit and raised to the level of self-reflective justification.⁴¹

This point is specifically illustrated in the case of the bourgeois tradition of cultural criticism in the rise of the literary canon as an idealist reaction to the social pressures of mass industrial society.

Following Raymond Williams's concept of residual cultural formations, mediated consciousness became increasingly fragmented. The resulting cultural dialectic thus defined the nature of the ideological fracture in critical discourse during the period. Bourgeois criticism in the early nineteenth century began to offer a self-consciously constructed and internalized notion of cultural resistance while the discourse from the plebeian public sphere increasingly accentuated its materialist critique of the political injustice and social dislocation produced by industrial capitalism. The split between the two spheres became increasingly polarized. While social revolution emerged as a legitimate option for the leading critics of the radical plebeian journals, for the most influential bourgeois critics in the *Edinburgh Review* the contemporary social crisis was seized upon as an opportunity to contain this profound transformation of social relations within an explicitly literary and cultural framework. As Thompson explains, this cultural process can be seen in the context of changes in the mass media itself:

We can understand the paradox of tradition and modernity by focusing on this consideration: the decline of traditional authority and the traditional grounding of action does not spell the demise of tradition but rather signals a shift in its nature and role, as individuals come to rely more and more on mediated and delocalized traditions as a means of making sense of the world and creating a sense of belonging.⁴²

Unlike the active and transformative role that intellectual practice played in the plebeian public sphere, bourgeois cultural politics sought to reinforce elite aesthetic values amidst disorienting social change. In both intellectual projects the role of the respective mediums of communication was pivotal, 'Communication media can be used not only to challenge and undermine traditional values and beliefs, but also to extend and consolidate traditions.'⁴³ Plebeian and bourgeois criticism sought to recreate their antecedent physical communicative spaces in the new material print cultures of their journalism. So with

Thompson's social theory of the media we can see how the evolutionary interaction between the media and the wider society in the early nineteenth century created the essential ideological structure for the symbolic cultural conflict traced in part two of this study.

Both Williams's theory of cultural materialism and Thompson's theory of symbolic interaction contribute to my wider theoretical engagement with British cultural history.

However, it is the recovery of communicative praxis, or what Habermas calls 'communicative action', in the fractured tradition of British cultural criticism that is my overriding aim. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* —Habermas's most recent and comprehensive assessment of a central problem in Western modernity concerning the fundamental disjunction between theory and praxis through cultural rationalization—a theory of critical discourse is outlined that points to a rational, consensual and non-instrumental solution to this ongoing cultural crisis.⁴⁴ I am attempting to restore the link

between two central forms of argumentation in the British critical tradition: practical discourse, with its expression of the moral-practical problems of society; and aesthetic criticism, with its evaluation of the adequacy of standards of cultural value in society.⁴⁵

The critical utilization of these two 'speech categories' from Habermas's complex revision of Marxist social theory places British cultural criticism in the broader trajectory of philosophical confrontations with the ongoing challenges and crises of modernity.

My analysis of symbolic cultural conflict in the British public sphere also relates to Habermas's more general attempt at a 'paradigm shift' in *The Theory of Communicative Action* from what the American Marxist cultural theorist John Brenkman has called 'an immanent critique of the philosophy of consciousness to a communications theory of intersubjectivity [that] attempts to retrieve a conception of the normative force of rationality without recourse to either the pure reason of transcendental ego or "mimesis"'.⁴⁶ This new conception of communicative rationality, Brenkman insists, is 'intrinsic to the processes by which societies reproduce themselves...'⁴⁷ Indeed, I shall argue that the symbolic cultural conflict played out in the intellectual arena of the early nineteenth-century British public

sphere materializes the distinction Habermas makes in *The Theory of Communicative Action* between a 'cognitive-instrumental rationality' that posits a relationship between 'a solitary subject to something in the objective world', and a more praxis-based model in which 'communicative actors move in the medium of a natural language, draw upon culturally transmitted interpretations, and relate simultaneously to something in the one objective world, something in their common social world, and something in each one's subjective world'.⁴⁸ It is hoped that this conception of communicative praxis in the plebeian public sphere will not only help to historicize Habermas's inter-subjective conception of modernity in a more accessible intellectual context, but will also contribute to the contemporary search for a more effective critical theory of society in the ongoing cultural resistance to the reifying processes of advanced capitalism.

In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas also introduces the powerful metaphor of the 'Lifeworld' to represent the lived traditions of cultural experience that actively seek to resist the colonizing twin powers of the modern bureaucratic state and the free market economy.⁴⁹ His theory of the Lifeworld, appropriated equally from Husserl, Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, imagines an alternative cultural space for the critical interrogation of administrative and economic institutions.⁵⁰ Habermas defines the Lifeworld as an ideal communicative space that also functions as a symbolic representation of a successful cultural modernity: 'The lifeworld, is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements.'⁵¹ Much like Williams's emphasis on the potential political emancipation to be found in popular cultural traditions, Habermas invests in the concept of the Lifeworld the sustaining power of shared symbolic meanings, histories and cultural solidarities. Similar to Thompson's theorization of the relationship between modernity and the media, Habermas recognizes that the intellectual participants in their respective public spheres are also deeply

implicated in the historical trajectories of these communicative cultural spaces:

‘Communicative actors are always moving within the horizon of their lifeworld; they cannot step outside of it.’⁵² Indeed, it is the defence of this Lifeworld against the colonizing forces of industrial capitalism that generates the symbolic cultural conflict in the early nineteenth-century British public sphere. The respective projects of cultural criticism in the plebeian and bourgeois public spheres become then, in this later conception of Habermasian social theory, differentiated intellectual reconstructions of the threatened Lifeworld. As Habermas puts it, language and culture ‘are constitutive of the lifeworld itself’, and by ‘drawing upon a cultural tradition’ the intellectuals in the Romantic period were also engaging in a struggle over the re-construction of social totality itself.⁵³

Now I will turn from a theoretical overview to a historical and social examination of two primary institutional variants in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres. This social-historical examination will necessitate a re-evaluation of the bourgeois Enlightenment model that Habermas uses as a normative ideal for communicative rationality in *Structural Transformation*. The leading journal of the bourgeois public sphere in early nineteenth-century Britain, the *Edinburgh Review*, evolved out of the intellectual networks and institutional bases of the mid-eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment. To fully grasp the subtle and unspoken intellectual confidences and cultural assumptions that set the parameters for critical discourse in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, we must first understand the elite intellectual movement that dominated the major cultural institutions of Edinburgh in the last half of the eighteenth century. From the interlocking relationships of the Moderate literati in the Church of Scotland, the University of Edinburgh and the various informal intellectual societies, there emerged a highly exclusive, self-referential notion of cultural discourse; a discourse which, I argue, became the dominant intellectual *Weltanschauung* in early nineteenth-century Britain. The extent to which these moral philosophers and critics made their claims for universality on the basis of a very narrow social experience will help uncover the ideological basis of the critical discourse found in

the *Edinburgh Review*. Concurrently, this ideological case study of the social roots of Enlightenment rationality in eighteenth-century Scotland will also highlight the critical limitations of Habermas's unnecessarily idealized bourgeois model of critical discourse from *Structural Transformation*.

Likewise, a parallel 'pre-history' of the radical plebeian public sphere will establish the extent to which the organization of alternative, counter-hegemonic spaces of intellectual practice and collective critical dissemination from the English Revolution up to the early nineteenth century persistently challenged the illusions of cultural consensus propagated by the ideologically dominant bourgeois model of the public sphere. From the critical activities of the Levellers to the mass forms of cultural protest of the Wilkite 'mobs', up to the Jacobin intellectual societies of the French Revolutionary period, there were significant examples of intellectual communities that constructed their cultural identities both within, and in opposition to, the social processes of modernity outlined by Habermas in *Structural Transformation* and *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Locating the institutional similarities of these historical forerunners of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere will aid an evaluation of the alternative cultural praxis centred around the leading radical journals of the period.

NOTES

¹ See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, pp. 18-46.

² See Raymond Williams, 'Literature and Sociology', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, pp. 11-30; and *Marxism and Literature*. Dennis Dworkin describes this indigenous British intellectual project of reconstructive totality thus: 'In France and Germany, sociology and historical materialism originated as efforts to understand the fragmentation of modern society and to formulate implicit and explicit solutions restoring social unity. Britain never produced its own classical sociology, but writers and critics such as Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, Samuel Coleridge, T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, William Morris, George Orwell, and John Ruskin developed its English equivalent.' See Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 80.

³ See Lucien Goldmann, *Cultural Creation in Modern Society*, trans. by Bart Grahl (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1976); and *Method in the Sociology of Literature*, trans. by William Boelhower (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 138.

⁵ Williams, 'Literature and Sociology', p.21.

⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 14.

⁷ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 15. Williams's initial attempt at articulating theories of working-class and bourgeois culture twenty years earlier in *Culture and Society* stresses their origins as discrete traditions: 'We may now see what is properly meant by "working-class culture"... it is... the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this. Bourgeois culture, similarly, is the basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from that.' See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993 [first publ. 1958]), p. 327.

⁸ It is relevant that the predominant usage of the term 'utilitarian' in the mid-nineteenth century was in opposition to 'aesthetic'. As Raymond Williams has noted of this Benthamite usage in *Keywords*: 'What utilitarian in this spelled-out sense emphasizes is a split of some kinds of activity from others. Art, that eminently practical word, was specialized as part of the same movement to a different kind of activity and a different kind of happiness or pleasure: contemplative or aesthetic.' See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), p. 328.

⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 17.

¹⁰ In *The Long Revolution* Williams breaks down the conceptual analysis of culture into three rival definitions which correlate to the bourgeois-idealist and plebeian-materialist divergence being discussed here. He lists respective 'ideal', 'documentary', and 'social' conceptions of culture. The first and third in this list anticipate the opposition in cultural practices that he will draw out from a more theoretical perspective in *Marxism and Literature*. See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 41-4.

¹¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 17.

¹² Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 80.

¹³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 87.

¹⁴ For an earlier attempt by Williams at defining this cultural concept see *The Long Revolution*, p. 48.

¹⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 133.

¹⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 113.

¹⁷ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 114.

¹⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 121.

¹⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 122.

²⁰ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 122.

²¹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 124.

²² For a provocative interpretation of the development of British socialist thought at the end of the nineteenth century that treats the two competing cultural discourses in this study from a more unified perspective, see Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 22-38; pp. 150-173. Pierson draws together both the Romantic social criticism of Carlyle and Ruskin with that of the more populist critique of capitalism by figures like Cobbett into one unique tradition of ethical socialism.

²³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 131.

²⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 131.

²⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 130-31.

²⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

²⁷ See Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 332-38.

²⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 132-3.

²⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 133-4.

³⁰ John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

³¹ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 3.

³² Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 27.

³³ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 37.

³⁴ Thompson borrows both from symbolic interactionist theory and hermeneutics in his conception of the symbolic mediation of modernity. See Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 210. My own conception of symbolic cultural practices relies on the more 'dialectical' approach outlined by William Sewell which posits a constructive tension between cultural systems and cultural practices. Sewell writes of this unified definition of cultural practice: 'System and practice constitute an indissoluble duality or dialectic: the important theoretical question is thus not whether culture should be conceptualized as practice or as a system of symbols and meanings, but how to conceptualize the articulation of system and practice.' See

William H. Sewell, Jr. 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society*, ed. by Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 35-61 (p. 47). I think this conception of cultural practices helpfully clarifies Williams's ideas about the social construction of cultural hegemony and the way in which symbolic cultural meanings are contested within society. For a good introduction to the work of symbolic interaction theory see Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). For a more theoretically up-to-date introduction to symbolic interactionism that includes an explicit engagement with postmodern theory, see Norman K. Denzin, *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

³⁵ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 10.

³⁶ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 17.

³⁷ For an early articulation of this position by Thompson see *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 135-62.

³⁸ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 41.

³⁹ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 182.

⁴¹ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 185.

⁴² Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 187.

⁴³ Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, p. 195.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Polity, 1984); and *The Theory of Communication Action: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Polity, 1987).

⁴⁵ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 23.

⁴⁶ John Brenkman, *Culture and Domination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 17.

⁴⁷ Brenkman, *Culture and Domination*, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 392; also quoted in Brenkman, *Culture and Domination*, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 346-49.

⁵⁰ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 126.

⁵¹ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 126.

⁵² Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 126.

⁵³ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 125.

Chapter Three

The *Edinburgh Review* and the Institutions of Cultural Leadership in the Scottish Enlightenment Public Sphere

The *Edinburgh Review* was a cultural institution that developed out of the waning years of the bourgeois intellectual movement in the cities of Lowland Scotland known today as the Scottish Enlightenment. The journal, although emerging as a more thoroughly metropolitan British manifestation in what some scholars have called the ‘post-Enlightenment’ period at the beginning of the nineteenth century, inherited much of its pattern of intellectual organization, conceptions of critical discourse and underlying ideological characteristics from the ‘high’ Scottish Enlightenment period of the later eighteenth century. Among the various institutional currents that fed into the general intellectual formation of the Scottish Enlightenment, the most significant can be located in the following types.

The first was a by-product of the diffuse metropolitan cultural trends of post-Union Edinburgh and included the development of some of the key social institutions of ‘cultural unionism’ like the network of coffee-houses, political clubs and taverns that formed to disseminate the new discourse of ‘moral journalism’ emerging from London in form of the pioneering periodicals, the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. The second type of institutional influence found expression in the common educational, religious and professional experiences of the socially dynamic generation of non-aristocratic Whig intellectuals in Edinburgh that came of age in the 1740s. This new social formation was defined by an explicit desire to materialize its intellectual ascendancy in a collectivity of mediating fora that included most of the areas of civil society in the mid-eighteenth century Scottish capital not officially controlled by the powerful Tory manager Henry Dundas. These were religious and educational spaces like the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the

classrooms at Edinburgh University transmitting the disciplinary innovations in moral philosophy, and some of the extra-academic sites of intellectual discourse and dissemination they inspired in the student debating clubs and intellectual gatherings near the Old College. For the generation of intellectuals at the end of the Scottish Enlightenment period that founded the *Edinburgh Review*, this academic connection was embodied in the form of the professor of moral philosophy Dugald Stewart, who as both teacher and seminal thinker provided them with a cohering epistemology. The third type of institutional current was primarily political and found its expression in the relationships of patronage between the intellectuals of the late Scottish Enlightenment in Edinburgh and one of the first modern think-tanks in British politics, the London based Whig salon of Holland House. In this chapter I hope to trace the ways in which these institutional currents laid the ideological foundation for the construction of the bourgeois public sphere in Edinburgh as the first intellectual Establishment of the modern British state.

The Origins of Bourgeois Critical Discourse: Intellectual Sociability and Cultural Unionism in the Making of Enlightenment Edinburgh

A general consensus has taken shape in much recent cultural and intellectual historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment that the broad-based movement in the salons, Universities and Church Assemblies of Lowland Scotland in the eighteenth century had as its primary impetus the political vacuum resulting from the constitutional settlement of the Act of Union in 1707.¹ However, I want to suggest here that the early institutional spaces of intellectual sociability also played an important role in the developing discourse of ‘cultural unionism’ in Edinburgh. These consisted of an informal network of salons, coffeehouses and professional clubs in which intellectual groups ranging in social status from aristocratic Tory gentlemen to middle-class Whig academics gathered to discuss the new genre of moral journalism reflected in the new periodicals.²

It was from the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* that a normative model of critical discourse was assimilated by the most influential of the Edinburgh literati, and subsequently developed during their penetration and eventual control of the primary institutional strongholds at the General Assembly and the University of Edinburgh. In this early period of the Scottish Enlightenment's social development it is important to recall two of its central ideological characteristics: the self-conscious effort on the part of its leading intellectuals to forge an identifiably British metropolitan cultural context for both themselves and their ideas; and the instrumental role that their dominance of the major new institutional bases played in the developing bourgeois discourse of social morality and civic virtue for their invented wider audience. I would suggest that the social development of the Scottish Enlightenment during this period serves as an illuminating case study for Habermas's model of the liberal public sphere from *Structural Transformation*.³

The cultural dialectic of the emerging British public sphere in the early years of the Scottish Enlightenment acted as a kind of compensation for the unfinished, synthetic nature of the British state's 'birth' in 1707. This synthesis of the local Enlightenment optimism of early eighteenth-century Edinburgh with the wider Augustan cultural discourse of politeness gleaned from the pages of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* created a confident new language of bourgeois British intellectual expression. The ascendant intellectual formation that would come to dominate the Church of Scotland as the Moderates and the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow as the literati was part of a newly emerging metropolitan British social elite which relied on certain basic cultural allegiances for its wider political identity.⁴ As declared Hanoverians, 'progressive' Whigs, and cultural cosmopolitans, this social elite attempted to utilize the new channels of communication provided by the liberal public sphere to spread a self-legitimizing message of a bourgeois commercial modernity. John Dwyer observes of this peculiarly self-validating form of patriotism found in the 'cultural unionism' of the Scottish literati: 'The aims of the Scottish literati were, at least on their own terms, patriotic. They wanted to shape a new vision of a harmonious, if hegemonic,

British community not merely in order to belong to it. Their programme was decidedly propagandistic, for they wished to proselytize their gospel of virtue and sentiment to a rapidly growing reading public.’⁵ The traumatic loss of the Scottish Parliament in 1707 led the rising bourgeois intellectuals of Edinburgh, in the historian Nicholas Phillipson’s words, to ‘fashion an alternative language of civic morality’ that relied on the innovative model of intellectual discourse established in the essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele from the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*.⁶ Some critics have gone so far as to suggest that the powerful role of these periodicals in shaping the structure of critical discourse in Edinburgh transformed the city into a kind of English cultural province.⁷ Indeed, Henry Mackenzie, the founder of two local Edinburgh derivatives of the London journals, *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*, in the final number of the former ‘apologized to his readers for the deficiencies of his periodical resulting from the fact that Edinburgh was not London’.⁸ Whatever the real role these periodicals played in shaping the structure and content of bourgeois critical discourse, this cultural continuity between Augustan London and post-Union Edinburgh was an important ideological precursor to the institutional reforms in the Church of Scotland and the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow during the mid-eighteenth century.⁹

According to Habermas, the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* were the seminal journalistic vehicles in cohering and advancing the development of the liberal public sphere in early eighteenth-century London. The journals carried on the ‘practical discourse’ of the coffeehouses at a time when the periodical was replacing these spaces as the acknowledged public instrument for cultural and literary debate. Equally significant was the way in which the dialogical structure of this new discourse resulted in the journals occupying the places of both object and subject in this extended network of critical discussion: ‘The dialogue form... employed by many of the articles, attested to their proximity to the spoken word. One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to reenter, via reading, the original conversational medium.’¹⁰ Indeed, the new collective

critical filter that the *Tatler* and *Spectator* represented transformed the very nature of the aesthetic and philosophical subjects it studied. After the establishment of this critical discourse in the early eighteenth century, Habermas observes that ‘philosophy was no longer possible except as critical philosophy, literature and art no longer [possible] except in connection with literary and art criticism’.¹¹

The discourse in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* commodified its topics of discussion in a manner that allowed for the creation of new, often partially formed, critical subjectivities in the wider reading public. As Habermas suggests: ‘In the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*... the public held up a mirror to itself; it did not yet come to a self-understanding through the detour of a reflection on works of philosophy and literature, art and science, but through entering itself into “literature” as an object.’¹² This asymmetrical relationship between the critics and their reading public in the developing bourgeois public sphere gave leading writers like Addison an unprecedented ideological authority. As Habermas describes the bourgeois critic’s function: ‘He worked toward the spread of tolerance, the emancipation of civic morality from moral theology and of practical wisdom from the philosophy of the scholars. The public that read and debated this sort of thing read and debated about itself.’¹³ Even at this early stage of the bourgeois public sphere’s development we can see how its leading critics were constantly ‘remaking’ the subjectivities of reading audiences through their intellectual polemics over a whole range of social, political and aesthetic issues.

The essays of Addison and Steele served a crucial mediating function in translating the teachings from the moral philosophy of Lord Shaftesbury to a busy, practically oriented commercial society developing in early eighteenth-century British cities like London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh.¹⁴ These essays were critical in emphasizing a ‘social propriety’ that ‘was the corollary of the burgeoning urban culture’ of the period.¹⁵ In the 1730s and 1740s these lessons of Shaftesbury were being transmitted in a more formal academic context through the pioneering moral philosophy lectures of Francis Hutcheson at the University of Glasgow.¹⁶ This new bourgeois discourse emphasized the

cultivation of social virtue through critical exchange in the ostensibly neutral ideological settings of the salon or coffee-house. The unifying aesthetic concept between the moral philosophy lectures and the 'moral journalism' of Addison and Steele was that of 'taste'. Although related to the classic Aristotelian idea of beauty, this new notion of taste emerging in the key institutions of the bourgeois public sphere in Edinburgh emphasized its instrumental moral function. This explicit linking of taste with social virtue was a key Enlightenment corrective to the objectivism of classical aesthetics. Beauty would be determined by 'what the critics agreed upon' rather than by the passive application of timeless classical rules.¹⁷ As Christopher Berry has observed, however, this new socially derived conception of taste created its own insidious forms of self-legitimation: 'There seems to be a vicious circularity about the Enlightenment position: good art is defined by good critics and a good critic is one who defines good art.'¹⁸ By taking part in critical debate in these new bourgeois settings, the participants were also engaging in a larger cultural conversation about the nature and values of modern commercial society generally and, as a result, exercising their powers of ideological legitimation over its development. An illusory notion of intellectual equality and inclusion was spread through these increasingly powerful mediating institutions of the bourgeois public sphere. As Nicholas Phillipson put it: 'In such company one was with equals and it was easy to learn the virtues of tolerance and detachment, and the pleasures of consensus.'¹⁹

Already we can see the normative dimension that defines Habermas's model of the liberal public sphere emerging from this privileged new subjectivity of urban aesthetic discourse. The notion of intellectual freedom Habermas develops in his study was profoundly influenced by Kant's privileging of Enlightenment critical debate as a necessary precondition to political progress. In this sense, critical self-thought, subjectively derived, was linked to the collectivity of humanity and an objectively understood progress to a just order.²⁰ To adapt Habermas's historical narrative of Enlightenment rationality from *Structural Transformation* to the Scottish context of early eighteenth-century Edinburgh,

these new ideas were being spread via ‘politically neutral’ social institutions like Thomas Ruddiman’s Literary Society and the Rankenian Club. Jacobite lawyers and Presbyterian ministers met in the former and university professors in the latter for the singular objective of mutual intellectual improvement.²¹ This post-Union cultural project that valorized the liberal bourgeois discourse of sociability and intellectual improvement would soon make significant inroads into the most powerful ideological institutions of mid-eighteenth century Scotland: the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh.

Ecclesiastical Politics, Academic Advancement and the Rise of the Scottish Enlightenment Literati

It is instructive to recall that the key intellectual figures of the Moderate movement in the Church of Scotland during the peak years of the Scottish Enlightenment were of the same generation, hailed from similar prosperous family backgrounds, and had all studied at Edinburgh University during the 1730s and the 1740s.²² As part of their university education William Robertson, Hugh Blair and Adam Ferguson — later innovators of such modern academic disciplines in the social sciences and humanities as political history, English literary studies and sociology, respectively — were required to study a general, broad based humanities course with the class in moral philosophy at its center.²³ The particular moral philosophy class they shared was taught by John Pringle and consisted of the moral theory of Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Pufendorf and Francis Bacon.²⁴ Not surprisingly in light of this largely pragmatic moral education at Edinburgh, these young divinity students soon developed a liberal Presbyterian theology that emphasized social morality at the expense of strict Calvinist doctrine. As Richard Sher has commented, their shared religious liberalism was part of a larger commitment to a newly developing bourgeois order, so that ‘without surrendering the fundamental Christian ideal of salvation, they attempted to supplement this otherworldly goal with ethical and ideological objectives

designed to increase virtue and happiness while strengthening the prevailing social, political, and ecclesiastical orders'.²⁵ For these young, progressive ministers open to the vibrant intellectual discourse at social gatherings like the Hen Club, the ecclesiastical instability and theological fanaticism of the Kirk in the 1730s provided a powerful impetus to construct a moderate institutional foundation in the Church through the patronage networks of its most liberal (and prosperous) of lay members.²⁶ The founding of the Moderate party grouping within the General Assembly was the culmination of this process.

The official birth of the Moderate party at an Edinburgh tavern in 1751 brought to a climax the efforts of these young clergymen and literati to merge the broad interests of the Church of Scotland and its General Assembly with that of the growing, but still largely discrete, social institutions of the liberal public sphere in Edinburgh. The resulting document inspired by that historic meeting—circulated a year later in 1752—came to be known as 'The Manifesto of the Moderate party', and should properly be understood as the first collective manifestation of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere in print.²⁷ Written in March 1752 chiefly by Robertson, but with the assistance of Blair, Alexander Carlyle and John Jardine, among others, the 'Reasons of Dissent' stressed the importance of three organizational issues within the Church of Scotland: institutional order above sectarian conscience; the adjudicating primacy of the General Assembly; and the growing social value and intellectual responsibility of the Kirk generally.²⁸ I recall this particular episode in Scotland's ecclesiastical history because it can also be viewed as an explicit attempt by these rising intellectuals to consolidate their moral and political authority around a new concept of collective rational deliberation and, in the process, establish the ideological groundwork for the creation of the Enlightenment public sphere of which the reformed Church became such an integral part. Indeed, the 'Reasons of Dissent' can be seen as an historic example of the later Habermasian concept of 'communicative consensus'—that is, a system for the resolving of ideological disputes based on the most compelling argument in a relatively status-free forum of debate.²⁹ The Moderates' claims did not go unopposed

or lack a compelling counter-argument. The Popular party, as the evangelical faction in the Church was called, put forth their own argument called 'Answers to the Reasons of Dissent', composed primarily by the distinguished theologian and future president of Princeton University, John Witherspoon.³⁰

It may be profitable to dwell for a moment on this significant local theological debate between the Popular and Moderate parties as illustrative of a larger social split in the intellectual discourse of the period. A recent study has argued that far from representing the forces of reaction and conservatism, the Popular party embodied that altogether paradoxical cultural entity (for the polite literati of the Moderate party, at any rate): a radical, populist and Enlightened intellectual movement.³¹ Without entering into a formal excursus on the ideological origins of the Great Disruption in the Kirk of 1843, we can recognize in the Popular party a genuinely popular intellectual formation that challenged the thrusting and socially dynamic bourgeois energy of the Moderate literati themselves. Indeed, this particular schism in the Church of mid-century helps throw into sharp relief the peculiar social placement of the Moderate intellectuals at this time. They were both challenging their patrician Tory opponents in the official political institutions of Hanoverian Scotland like the Faculty of Advocates, while at the same time defending their hard fought gains in the newly energized institutions of civil society like the Church and the Universities from their 'social inferiors' in the evangelical wing of the Popular party. This episode powerfully illustrates Geoff Eley's dialectical explication of the Habermasian model from chapter one. At the very moment of its birth, the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere was faced with a more popular intellectual movement that was both 'combative and highly literate'.³²

The Evangelical-Moderate debates in the Church of Scotland continued into the 1750s and helped solidify the relationship of the Moderates with that of the growing liberal bourgeoisie in Edinburgh. In 1756 another watershed episode occurred that tested the new atmosphere of intellectual liberalism both in the Kirk and in the nascent Enlightenment public sphere evolving in Edinburgh more generally. The debate in question focused

particularly on the nature of David Hume's status as an independent source of intellectual and moral authority in the growing liberal public sphere of Moderate clergy and academics in Edinburgh. Hume's successful defence by the Presbyterian minister Robert Wallace against a motion of censure by the Kirk serves as an object lesson in the increasing ideological power accruing to this new Moderate formation. Wallace defended Hume by emphasizing the broad social value of intellectual dialogue between such an important official institution as the Church and the other related, but independent social institutions, illustrated in this particular case by Hume's intellectual gatherings at the Advocates' Library (later to be institutionalized as the Select Society). As the social historian Anand Chitnis has observed, this episode established an important institutional precedent in the evolving social rules of the Enlightenment public sphere in Edinburgh:

...Wallace made a point of some importance in understanding the Moderate outlook: he argued that clergy were part and parcel of society and not separate from it, simply because society was the object of the influence. Hence they were to partake of all that society offered if they so chose and conversation even with heretical intellectuals was one of society's offerings.³³

After this watershed the Church of Scotland became firmly entrenched as a central part of the wider institutional network of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere.

The official debates in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland also contributed to the atmosphere of rigorous and open intellectual exchange that marked the high Scottish Enlightenment period. Indeed, these gatherings, ostensibly to discuss theological developments and organizational issues in the Kirk, became sites of open political struggle over the ideological shape of civil society in Enlightenment Scotland. At its peak in the 1760s and 1770s, these debates and factional maneuverings in the General Assembly, in the words of Christopher Harvie, 'looked more like a parliament than many of the provincial assemblies of continental Europe'.³⁴ In this new quasi-parliamentary context, eloquent and shrewd delegates like the historian William Robertson rose through the Moderate ranks and eventually gained fame for both the persuasive force and intellectual

integrity of their arguments—in Robertson’s case becoming both the Moderator of the General Assembly and the Principal of Edinburgh University. Robertson’s rise through these ideologically strategic institutions of Edinburgh civil society strikingly resembled that of the quintessential Habermasian intellectual figure depicted in *Structural Transformation*. Unlike the political power wielded by the Tory manager Henry Dundas at the time, Robertson’s political status in Enlightenment Edinburgh was attained through the superiority of his debating skills in institutions like the General Assembly, thus exemplifying Habermas’s dictum that ‘In the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence—the immortality of fame.’³⁵

The powerful position of intellectual patronage exercised by Robertson as Principal of Edinburgh University during a key period in the development of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere illustrates the central place that academic institution occupied in Scottish civil society. Richard Sher has commented on Robertson’s accession to the principalship: ‘For the institutionalization of Moderate authority and Enlightenment values in Scotland, the election of William Robertson as principal of Edinburgh University was probably the most important single event of the eighteenth century.’³⁶ As part of this trend, the appointment of Adam Ferguson to the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh in 1764 completed the dominance of the Moderate literati of the major cultural institutions of Scotland in the 1760s. His counterpart at Glasgow University, Thomas Reid, commented on the immense popularity of Ferguson’s lectures at Edinburgh during those first few years of his professorship: ‘Students overflowed into the gallery and were frequently joined by “gentlemen of rank”.’³⁷ As we shall see below, it was just this kind of student enthusiasm that would lead to the creation of some of the key student societies of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere.

After Ferguson’s retirement from active teaching in the 1780s, the appointment of Dugald Stewart to his moral philosophy chair in 1785 served as another key event in the intellectual trajectory of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere. It was through Stewart’s

lectures during this period that the philosophical project of Common Sense, initiated by Reid at Aberdeen and Glasgow universities, became transmitted to a wider intellectual public in Edinburgh. These classes indirectly led to the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 by some of his most ambitious students: Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner.³⁸ Indeed, one of the most prominent student societies of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, the Academy of Physics, was founded by and consisted primarily of Stewart's students. It is to these key intermediate sites of intellectual discourse that I now turn.

Philosophical Societies and the Hierarchies of Discourse in the Scottish Enlightenment Public Sphere

The University of Edinburgh and the Church of Scotland were the two primary institutional strongholds of the Moderate literati in the wider Enlightenment public sphere. Their influence on the morally didactic nature of cultural discourse produced by the liberal public sphere of Edinburgh has been recognized by Anand Chitnis: 'It is important to remember the parallel between the lecture and the sermon, both important features of separate but vital Scottish social institutions that were remembered for their impact.'³⁹ Occupying an intermediate space between these two defining institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere were the grouping of less formal intellectual gatherings in the salons, debating clubs and student societies of Edinburgh. These primarily social spaces were prime examples of the Habermasian communicative ideal from *Structural Transformation*: 'The students' own societies, where they themselves determined the subjects of interest and the form of their pursuit, were equally significant as assemblies which encouraged talent, association and familiarity.'⁴⁰ In order to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between critical discourse and social context in this increasingly influential institutional matrix, I will now briefly review the membership and intellectual characteristics of the three most

influential philosophical societies of the Scottish Enlightenment: the Select Society, the Speculative Society and the Academy of Physics.

The Select Society met at the Advocates' Library (later to become the National Library of Scotland) where Hume was the chief librarian. Founded by the artist Allan Ramsay in 1754 it assembled the most dynamic intellectual figures of Enlightenment Edinburgh for the purposes of broad discourse on general issues of material, economic, social and cultural improvement. The key members were independent cultural figures like Ramsay and Hume; leading Moderate clergy like Robert Wallace, John Jardine, John Home, Hugh Blair and Alexander Carlyle; prominent university professors from the arts and sciences like William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, William Cullen and Adam Smith; and distinguished advocates like Lords Monboddo and Kames and Alexander Wedderburn. As Chitnis has observed of this gathering of local intellectual luminaries, 'here was the Edinburgh Enlightenment acting together in a microcosm.'⁴¹

The mixed aristocratic-bourgeois social make-up of the Select Society powerfully illustrated the growing political currency of intellectual discourse in the cultural capital of post-Union Scotland. Like its predecessor the Honourable Society for Improvement in the Knowledge of Agriculture, the discourse of the Select Society soon became appropriated by an aristocratic/high bourgeois ruling order. Indeed, as Nicholas Phillipson argues, this new cultural nexus of the bourgeois public sphere in Enlightenment Edinburgh actually served to consolidate the power of the ruling elite in a more subtle, intellectually dynamic guise: '...Scotland's traditional aristocratic elite had come to regard the intellectuals as a *corps d' elite* which provided their class with the sort of leadership it was unable to provide for itself.'⁴² With reference to the development of the political public sphere in eighteenth-century France, Habermas recognizes that this temporary bourgeois/aristocratic social alliance was a necessary stage in the ideological progression of liberal civil society: 'Brought into life, with the help of intellectuals who had risen socially, in the womb of a parasitic, economically and politically functionless, yet socially eminent nobility the sphere

of a public that eventually also engaged in critical debate of political issues now definitively became the sphere in which civil society reflected on and expounded its interests.⁴³ The lasting effects of this social alliance on the development of critical discourse in the bourgeois public sphere can be seen in the structure of intellectual debate in the Select Society.

By adhering to a fixed programme of meetings and debates at a specific place and time, this new informal institution of the bourgeois public sphere created an important physical space in which its version of communicative rationality attempted to bring about a kind of *de-facto* public legitimation to the official institutions of civil society in Edinburgh. When we understand that the two key official institutions of the Church and University were also dominated by these Enlightenment literati, we can begin to appreciate the kind of self-affirming ideological circularity being constructed within the bourgeois public sphere at this time. As Richard Sher has observed, socio-intellectual institutions like the Select Society gave their participants an ideal opportunity to prove themselves both personally and professionally: ‘... by distinguishing themselves in the Select Society, these Moderate ministers not only improved the image of the Presbyterian clergy in the eyes of many laymen but also established friendships and connections that would prove invaluable for their ecclesiastical policies and personal careers’.⁴⁴ Crucially for the wider argument of this study, which attempts to trace critical cultural discourse to its material and ideological origins, this narrow professional and social agenda of the Select Society led to the founding of the first incarnation of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1756 by Robertson, Hume, Blair, Smith, George Jardine and Alexander Wedderburn. The journal’s primary purpose was to transmit these intellectuals’ notion of a ‘free’, informing liberal discourse to a wider literate public than the small coterie of the Select Society’s approximately 80 members in 1755.⁴⁵ However, even this first incarnation of the *Edinburgh Review* was also rather less subtly used as a polemical organ of the Moderate party to further its own partisan aims in the ongoing theological debates of the 1750s with their Popular party opponents.⁴⁶ As we

shall later see, the generative relationship between these intellectual societies and their more lasting physical products—the journals themselves—was perpetuated with the founding of the second, and more influential, version of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 by the most active and prominent members of the Speculative Society.

The Speculative Society was founded in 1764, primarily to ‘raise’ the level of spoken and written literary discourse in Edinburgh to that of the ‘educated’ British standard being developed in the many contemporary cultural projects of the London public sphere.⁴⁷ The meetings were held in the Old College at Edinburgh University and followed a regular format that would help contribute to the distinctively didactic structure of discourse in the second *Edinburgh Review*. In a typical gathering of the society a distinctive pattern of discourse was established.⁴⁸ A paper would be read and discussed, and then followed by a set debate on another subject. The intellectual range of such topics for debate was impressive: speculative philosophy, politics, literature, history and specific issues of public policy were all included on the set agenda.⁴⁹ This format, encouraging a rather free mix of the abstract and the directly political, was carried over into the intellectually restless essay style of the *Edinburgh Review*.⁵⁰ An ideal example of this style can be found in Francis Jeffrey’s lead article in the first issue of that journal in 1802, where he discussed the French writer J.J. Mounier’s study of the French *philosophes* and their impact on the Revolution from variously abstract and political perspectives.⁵¹ In this, as George Pottinger has commented, Jeffrey was merely ‘inviting his readers to share in the kind of debate he had enjoyed at the Speculative Society...’⁵² Significantly for the discussion of the internal dialectics of bourgeois social criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* which I undertake in chapter five, the intellectual agenda of the Speculative Society related directly—indeed grew out of—the famed lectures in moral philosophy from Dugald Stewart (I will discuss Stewart’s influence on the generation of intellectuals that founded the second *Edinburgh Review* in more detail in chapter five). The social composition of the Speculative Society, like that of the Select Society, conformed to the Habermasian

bourgeois ideal of free intellectual discourse across class lines from the English aristocracy down to the aspiring Scottish middle-classes.⁵³ In short, this mixed bourgeois/aristocratic social make-up of the Speculative Society most closely anticipated the future readership of the second *Edinburgh Review*.

The Academy of Physics, founded in 1797 as a student society on the initiative of Henry Brougham, was the last and hence the most immediately influential of the three main intellectual societies on the development of the *Edinburgh Review*. Indeed, its most active members were closely associated with the founding of the journal in 1802; Francis Jeffrey, Brougham and Francis Horner all were guiding figures in the society. The Academy of Physics was also the most ideologically influential of the student societies on the topical discourse and content of the *Edinburgh Review*. By gathering progressive young Whig intellectuals together to discuss the most radical aspects of Scottish Enlightenment scientific and social thought—from physics and geology to political economy and social anthropology—the Academy essentially provided the founding narratives of British capitalism with its own form of critique.⁵⁴

Other social institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere included prominent, if more informal, organizations like the Poker Club, the Oyster Club and the Friday Club. The Poker Club was constituted in 1762, originally to promote the politically sensitive idea of a Scottish Militia. Its membership overlapped with that of the Select Society.⁵⁵ The Oyster Club was established by Adam Smith, Joseph Black and Joseph Hutton and included an inter-generational membership, mixing many of the major figures of the ‘high’ and ‘post’ Scottish Enlightenment periods; among them Adam Ferguson, Robert Adam, Hugh Blair, William Cullen, Playfair, William Robertson and Dugald Stewart. The final notable social club of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere was the Friday Club, founded in 1803 by the students of Stewart, John Playfair and the prominent Glasgow University professor of civil law John Millar, for the purposes of combining literary discourse and sociability. The membership intersected with that of both the

Speculative Society and the Academy of Physics and included the main early contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* such as Jeffrey, Brougham, Henry Mackenzie, Francis Horner and Henry Cockburn, as well as the Tory novelist Sir Walter Scott.⁵⁶

These informal yet ideologically integrating social institutions of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere demonstrate both the intellectual idealism and the ideological contradictions of the Habermasian model of communicative rationality from *Structural Transformation*. They united different social groupings in privatized spaces of friendly rational debate and civil discourse. A prominent example of this was the private salon gatherings held at the home of Professor Dugald and Helen Stewart at Ainslie Place, Edinburgh. Following the distinctive pattern set by the student societies, these informal yet intellectually prestigious social meetings mixed the humble student with the prominent aristocrat and hence approximated Habermas's notion of a bourgeois public sphere as an intellectual space in which outside social hierarchies were temporarily 'bracketed'.⁵⁷

Taken together these social gatherings acted as the key intermediate institutions connecting the Moderate literati of the Church of Scotland and the leading scholars at the University of Edinburgh with a powerful professional class of lawyers, merchants and politicians. In a very general sense they exemplified the incestuous nature of intellectual discourse across the liberal public sphere in Enlightenment Edinburgh. As Anand Chitnis commented:

Societies also developed from educational stimuli when students, exposed to ideas or exercises such as debates in the classroom, took them up outside. To that extent certain significant and successful student societies arose from the distinctive Scottish university education. Then again clubs (...) promoted the social life and, consequently, furthered the intellectual interaction of the literati or of specific professional groups.⁵⁸

This homogenous social 'diversity', I would argue, provided the ideological foundations for the development of bourgeois cultural criticism in the early nineteenth century. These discrete examples of the social make-up of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, when

taken together, reveal the ideological complexities submerged beneath Habermas's idealized model of cultural discourse from *Structural Transformation*. However, the intellectuals associated with the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere were far from isolated, provincial academics and ministers working in the relative isolation of Edinburgh. In the early nineteenth century they were able to transmit the bulk of their ideological legacy to a metropolitan British audience through the *Edinburgh Review*, and perhaps less well known, through direct and frequent contact between the young post-Enlightenment intellectuals associated with the journal and the network of Whig institutions in London. Indeed, these were the thinkers and institutions most responsible for working out a coherent philosophical response to the ideological polarity between Pittite reaction and Jacobin revolution. The resulting political philosophy of liberal Whiggism would not achieve true ideological ascendancy until 1830. But when it did finally codify its political vision in the Reform Bill of 1832, it would exert a tenacious hold over the British intellectual Establishment for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

British Philosophical Whiggism and The Scottish Enlightenment Public Sphere in London

The Scottish Enlightenment public sphere had some key intellectual extensions into the most prominent Whig circles of London. Indeed, it was this intellectual metropolitanism that enabled the critics from the *Edinburgh Review* to claim the wider British bourgeois public sphere as their proper domain. The critics associated with the journal had two primary focal points in London: the King of Clubs, a liberal social club founded by Sir James Mackintosh and Sydney Smith's brother; and Holland House, the reformist Whig salon operated by Lord Holland, Charles James Fox's nephew and political heir. The King of Clubs was the gathering spot for the leading liberal thinkers of the period in London, a

place where the Rev. Thomas Malthus could discuss aspects of his influential theories of political economy with the founding members of the *Edinburgh Review*.⁵⁹

Holland House was by far the more important institution in establishing the reputations and political influence of the critics and intellectuals associated with the *Edinburgh Review*. It was Holland House that most closely approximated the French-inspired model of a bourgeois intellectual institution outlined in *Structural Transformation*.⁶⁰ It was both a liberal political centre where patronage could be matched with up-and-coming intellectual talent, and a cultural space for the dissemination of literature:

Holland House was a salon in the European mould, that is a means of wielding political power, of being the hub of political wheels, of attracting young men of talent who would then be found patrons and thereafter remain in debt to the promoters of their political careers... But the description 'salon' has cultural rather than social or political connotations: it has been further shown that the Hollands saw an intimate connection between literature and politics, and literature was certainly their favourite leisure pursuit. Consequently, Holland House 'acquired a quite extraordinary pre-eminence and popularity', 'represented a self-conscious attempt to bring the powerful and the best together' and Lord and Lady Holland have been assessed as 'intellectual impresarios of a self-conscious elite'.⁶¹

The manner in which these political assumptions were embedded within the wider cultural discourse at Holland House helps to explain the ideological nature of much of the resulting social criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*, particularly in its inability to engage with the major political and social crises of the early nineteenth century from anything other than a liberal middle-class perspective. Lord Holland himself held classically reformist Whig views. This liberal political ideology sought, above all, to maintain the constitutional equilibrium between the reactionary aristocracy and the insurgent radicalism of the plebeian class. In this political vision, as in the social philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, it was the 'property-owning aristocracy', or bourgeoisie, who had to maintain the impetus for moderate reform between these two competing social forces. In a striking anticipation of the intellectual activities of modern think-tanks, any radical impulse of this nascent

liberal Whiggism would first have to be filtered through the proper opinion-forming institutions, of which the *Edinburgh Review* was a principal conduit. Indeed, the activities at Holland House represented one of the first attempts at modern functionalist policy-making, linking directed intellectual activity with discrete critical outlets in an effort to achieve ideological hegemony. What it did in practice was to both valorize and reproduce some of the exclusionary bourgeois intellectual practices of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere: 'Hence it appears that the only intellectual current of the day which impinged at all on Holland House between 1797 and 1840 was that of the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Edinburgh reviewers were the link between the two.'⁶²

The official political power that grew out of these informal social mechanisms linking post-Enlightenment Edinburgh and Whig London were most clearly evidenced in the intimate personal relationships amongst the new Whig Government of 1830 and the 'Scottish reviewers', as they were then known. In 1830 Holland himself became a Cabinet minister and during this period his salon often doubled as an unofficial ministerial headquarters. At this time Holland House functioned as perhaps the first modern think-tank in British politics, uniting sympathetic intellectuals with powerful politicians in a common ideological project of philosophical Whiggism. For the most ambitious bourgeois critics associated with the *Edinburgh Review*, it was the political end-point in a process that began with the student societies of their intellectual youth, and, very much like in those extra-academic institutions of Edinburgh, 'promotion was eased by the facility it provided for social and political intermingling'.⁶³ In this sense the journey from the intellectual insurgency of the Scottish Enlightenment in the mid-eighteenth century to the ideological hegemony achieved by the critics of the *Edinburgh Review* in the political public sphere of London in the early nineteenth century was finally completed. By 1830 the star pupils of the waning years of the Edinburgh Enlightenment had become instrumental intellectual players in the reformist Whig consensus. It was an achievement of a kind of intellectual leadership rehearsed by their predecessors in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Richard Sher has located an ideologically self-legitimizing cycle of critical discourse in much of the intellectual work of the major Scottish literati. Sher asserts that the cultural status of the main figures of the Scottish Enlightenment was neither oppositional nor subversive, but decidedly establishmentarian:

The literati of eighteenth-century Scotland were not angry or alienated intellectuals, eking out a living as hack writers or translators, satirizing the elite of their society, or dodging the censors and authorities...Rather, the literati of the Scottish Enlightenment were nearly all what one would now call middle- and upper middle-class professional men. Their outlook was, if not a function of, certainly appropriate to their place as leading members of the liberal professions in a 'provincial society'.⁶⁴

In order to comprehend the larger ideological project that animated much of the movement's critical discourse, it is necessary to examine the most deeply held assumptions of these intellectuals, both about themselves and their rapidly changing society. Sher, the most sophisticated of the recent intellectual historians of the Scottish Enlightenment, helpfully dissects and defines the movement in broadly cultural terms. The comprehensive and insightful nature of his definition warrants extended quotation here:

'Literati' signifies men of arts and letters who adhered to a broad body of 'enlightened' values and principles held in common by European and American *philosophes*. These included a love of learning and virtue; a faith in reason and science; a dedication to humanism and humanitarianism; a style of civilized urbanity and polite conversation; a preference for social order and stability; a respect for hard work and material improvement; an attraction to certain types of worldly pleasures and amusements... a commitment to religious tolerance and freedom of expression; and at last a modicum of optimism about the human prospect if people would take the trouble to abide by these principles and cultivate their gardens as best they can.⁶⁵

These shared moral values of the most dynamic intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment help us not only to understand their specific works of history, philosophy, theology and science, but also enables us to map the broad ideological parameters of the metropolitan liberal bourgeois public sphere founded by their successors through the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802.⁶⁶

Any further discussion of the collective ideological identity of this public sphere must include an account of the way in which the intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment defined the nature of their critical enterprise from largely self-serving motives. This emerging ideology of bourgeois critical practice is most clearly illustrated by the leading Scottish Enlightenment rhetorician and minister Hugh Blair in his definition of the philosophy of Moderatism. He begins, much like Habermas in *Structural Transformation*, by defining liberal intellectual practice in its most general aspects as a universal social good: ‘the freedom of inquiry and debate... has undoubtedly been the source from whence many blessings have flowed upon mankind’.⁶⁷ However, Blair goes on to clearly distinguish between the benefits of this rather abstractly defined freedom of expression, and the more subversive notion of freedom of action: ‘the proper objects of censure and reproof are not freedom of thought, but licentiousness of action...’⁶⁸ I suggest that this very narrow definition of the functions of communicative rationality closely relates to the privileged social position of the Enlightenment intellectual in eighteenth-century Scottish society. For this representative intellectual figure (and generalizations of this sort seem ideally suited to the socially homogeneous milieu under examination) there was a clear, implicitly understood distinction between critical discourse, liberally conceived, and any form of oppositional praxis.

The literati of the Scottish Enlightenment benefited handsomely from the status-quo of late Hanoverian British capitalism. As the most privileged inheritors of a cosmopolitan British identity fashioned out of the Union settlement of 1707, they capitalized on their self-made status as the new cultural leaders of ‘North Britain’: ‘Increased wealth and status made it possible for the Moderate literati to integrate themselves into the social elite of Scotland, where few Presbyterian clergymen had previously ventured. Henceforth they moved easily in polite society as men of distinction in their own right.’⁶⁹ Their political control over the two most influential ideological institutions of late eighteenth-century Scotland—the Kirk and the University of Edinburgh—enabled them ‘to provide an

institutional foundation for the cultural values in which they believed'.⁷⁰ In a very real sense, then, their primary modes of cultural discourse became dedicated and self-legitimizing outlets for their 'universal' liberal world view. Sher puts the matter more bluntly, if not inaccurately: 'In their capacities as parish ministers and university professors the Moderate literati of Edinburgh functioned as ideological propagandists, striving to instill the main tenets of their moral philosophy into their congregations and students.'⁷¹ The dominant modes of communication employed by these intellectuals and their cultural institutions, with moral philosophy being the most typical critical vehicle during the high Scottish Enlightenment period, also reflected their wider ideological identity.

The institutional roots and critical aims of academic moral philosophy cannot be separated from the distinctive evolution of socio-intellectual life during the eighteenth-century in Edinburgh. As well as being the most characteristic academic discipline of the Scottish Enlightenment, moral philosophy can also be recognized as a critical discourse which developed in conjunction with the broader cultural trends in the liberal public sphere of Enlightenment Scotland:

...the movement of Scottish moral psychology appears to have paralleled certain broader cultural movements—the awakening of middle-class cultural ambitions that was encouraged by the Act of Union; the spread of intellectual tolerance under the eighteenth century Moderate regime; the growth of confidence in native academic institutions; native intellectual traditions, and the role of rational inquiry within religious life.⁷²

Moral philosophy as utilized by the Scottish literati was a flexible disciplinary tool that allowed a fusion of the intellectual functions of both church and university. In this regard it proved an invaluable ideological vehicle for disseminating the modern strain of Christian Stoicism that in practice served to rationalize a *de-facto* political accommodation with the profound social and cultural changes wrought by laissez-faire capitalism: '... it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between submission to Providence and submission to the existing system of social "ranks" and orders. To men as comfortable in their social milieu

as Blair and the other Moderate literati of Edinburgh; the divine and social orders blended easily into a single entity; resignation to one implied resignation to the other.’⁷³ It was this particular ideological characteristic embedded within the discourse of Enlightenment moral philosophy that carried over to influence the form and function of bourgeois social criticism as it emerged from the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. Whether it was Dugald Stewart developing and refining his so-called Common-Sense approach to philosophy and aesthetics, or Francis Jeffrey arguing for a more radical extension of the Scottish Enlightenment ‘Science of Man’, or Thomas Carlyle’s complex assimilation and synthesis of German Romantic aesthetics with its supposed opposite, Scottish moral philosophy, the leading voices of bourgeois criticism all took as given the premise that their discourse was produced by, intended for, and must remain, the province of a moral and intellectual elite.

This relationship between strategies of cultural legitimation and the privileged social positionality of the Scottish Enlightenment intellectuals may also be seen in the context of a longer, uniquely Scottish tradition of moral leadership. The cultural historian David Allan claims that the leading scholars of the Scottish Enlightenment strategically asserted their own cultural authority—and hence political power—in a context of historic moral leadership in Scotland:

They were thus able to portray their own intellectual contemporaries as the rightful leaders of Scotland's culture, political life, and moral improvement. By sharpening the traditional Scottish focus upon the eminent orator, in particular, and reducing still further the small moral distance which lay between eloquence and wisdom, enlightened scholars, I shall argue, succeeded in emphasizing to an unprecedented degree the claims of the intellectual to be regarded as the candidate best qualified for the leadership of society.⁷⁴

Thus the evolution of the Enlightenment public sphere took advantage of an historically constructed connection between intellectuals and their wider audiences in Scottish society—whether in the Church pews, university classrooms or salons of Edinburgh and Glasgow. As Allan reminds us, this ideological circularity built into the cultural discourse

of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere both created and anticipated its own responses: 'Enlightened Scottish scholars busily sought to reconstruct as the moral apex of society an audience of men who, like themselves, not only possessed learning and cultivation, but also encouraged its public dissemination.'⁷⁵

This symbiotic relationship between the most prominent intellectuals of the bourgeois public sphere in Enlightenment Edinburgh and their wider, increasingly diffuse audience also affected critical discourse in a different way. During a period of enormous social change the role of the public intellectual and moralist became increasingly highlighted and influential. In this regard the distinctively social orientation of the dominant mode of historical scholarship in the Scottish Enlightenment, the so-called 'historical sociology' of capitalist civilization pioneered by Adam Ferguson and further developed by Adam Smith, can be viewed as another attempt by the intellectuals to assert their own cultural leadership:

... the characteristic enlightened 'history of manners' may simply have been pursued in order to reveal the causes and moral implications of cultural and intellectual development. This is a question which... can only have seemed more relevant than ever to a confident community of aspiring Scottish intellectual and cultural leaders in an age of bewildering social, economic and political change.⁷⁶

This cultural pattern suggests a highly subjective and polemical impetus to the critical discourse of the Enlightenment public sphere in Scotland. Crucially, it was this confident status of cultural leadership in the wider liberal public sphere that enabled the literati to define the relevant subject matter, appropriate terms, and proper cultural qualifications necessary for 'legitimate' intellectual debate. Allan remarks of this new cultural monopoly being shaped in Enlightenment Scotland:

They felt themselves now to be collectively the architects and guardians of a newly virtuous and learned society in Scotland, one which would be defined and shaped by its moral scholarship. For such men, becoming 'enlightened' palpably meant much more than simply the construction and dissemination of formal historical knowledge. Learning more than ever implied the acquisition of the moral and social credentials deemed to be necessary for full and responsible membership of a civilized modern community. As scholars holding the public ear, therefore, the literati of the Scottish Enlightenment

seemed to themselves both competent and numerous enough at last to set about rebuilding this kind of society in precisely their own deeply learned image.⁷⁷

This control over the legitimation of public knowledge would play a key role in determining the defensive posture of the social criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*, particularly with regard to its more boisterous, and politically radical, plebeian counterpart.

The early nineteenth-century bourgeois public sphere in Britain, as illustrated by the intellectual agenda of its most influential periodical, the *Edinburgh Review*, sustained a basic ideological continuity with the Scottish Enlightenment project. As this chapter has illustrated, the journal's leading intellectual figures were united by some very distinctive institutional inheritances. Intellectually, the long shadow cast by Dugald Stewart over his former pupils influenced the wide topical discourse of the *Edinburgh Review* and led to its most recognizable cultural positions. Politically and socially, the many intermediate networks of the Whig establishment in London, most prominently that of the great Whig salon of Holland House, provided the *Edinburgh Review* critics with a direct entry into the most powerful bourgeois reformist movement of early nineteenth century Britain. Finally, as discrete cultural products of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, the particular form of the essays themselves—whether as highly discursive book reviews in the first decade of the nineteenth century, or in the increasingly idealist meditations typified by Thomas Carlyle's essays in the late 1820s—put into print the discourse to be found in the bourgeois social network of clubs, debating societies and extra-academic intellectual gatherings of Enlightenment Edinburgh.⁷⁸

It is also important to recognize how the changed circumstances of the early nineteenth-century British public sphere reproduced these social and cultural patterns of the Scottish Enlightenment in new and distinctive forms. As Jon Klancher has speculated, just as the new print critics of the bourgeois public sphere 'could not organize their readers without mediating them through other collective forms'—in the case of the *Edinburgh Review* the various forms of intellectual society from the Scottish Enlightenment—they

also helped imagine 'the audience they wished to construct'.⁷⁹ Paradoxically, it was the very absence of the shared intellectual intimacy from the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere that eventually determined the ideological trajectory of the *Review*'s most prominent works of social criticism. In the cultural practice of post-Enlightenment moral journalism, intellectuals were 'encouraged to adopt a style of political and literary criticism which was rooted, not in eternal principles sanctioned by reason, time and the authority of great men, but in the experience of ordinary literate and responsible men living in a modern age'.⁸⁰ Thus it was in their imagined middle-class readership that the critics of the *Edinburgh Review* were forced to place their faith and direct their ideas, and not the heroic intellectual community of their youth in late Enlightenment Edinburgh. Indeed, it was this transformed intellectual subjectivity that contributed to the new syntheses and cultural projects undertaken in the increasingly discursive essays.

The readership of the *Edinburgh Review* typified the audience of the bourgeois public sphere in the early nineteenth century more than any other journal. With the aid of improved roads and communications networks the *Review* soon had a pan-British circulation, with active readerships in all the major cities and most particularly in London, Birmingham, Dublin and Manchester, as well as in its obvious Scottish centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Replacing the tight intellectual community of Enlightenment Edinburgh was a more diffuse network of readers amongst the upper and middle classes. This group consisted of, as Jeffrey estimated, some twenty thousand in what he considered the 'fashionable or public life', in such professions as the clergy, law and civil service, as well as the more prosperous merchants, gentry and manufacturers earning in excess of eight hundred pounds per year; in short the nascent British bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ Moving down the social scale, Jeffrey reckoned that the audience included some two hundred thousand more infrequent readers in the petty bourgeois occupations, as well as the lesser clergy and civil servants.⁸² At one level this readership was distinguished through the journal's not inconsiderable issue price of five (and then six) shillings, a full

day's pay for a common labourer.⁸³ It was within these broad cultural terms that journals like the *Edinburgh Review* constructed their readerships. For editors like Jeffrey, as Klancher observed, 'It became important... to make one's intended reader potential, not already well defined, prior to the journal's own discourse'.⁸⁴ This would be dictated by that readership's 'ethos, its framework of educational capacity, ideological stance, economic ability, and cultural dispositions'.⁸⁵

Despite this transition from an elite intellectual community to a mass middle-class reading public, the transformation of intellectual subjectivity reflected in the writings of the *Edinburgh Review* was worked out within a significantly preserved cultural syntax. Indeed, the community of writers and readers in the bourgeois public sphere centered around the *Edinburgh Review* developed an ideologically circuitous and self-generating form of critical discourse. Books written by dominant figures of the Scottish Enlightenment would be reviewed in the journal in much the same way that a literary society meeting would have proceeded in late-eighteenth century Edinburgh. The most prominent example of this cultural syntax could be seen in the discourse that was generated by Francis Jeffrey's lengthy reviews of his former teacher Dugald Stewart's re-working of the Common-Sense philosophical tradition from his two studies, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid* (1802) and *Philosophical Essays* (1810). Thus, we can appreciate how the dialectics of criticism in this public sphere evolved out of lines of thought already made familiar from an ideologically static intellectual tradition. In the manner of Jeffrey's careful revision of Stewart, Thomas Carlyle would undertake a similar revision of the Common-Sense project with his innovative, but politically quietist, discourse of cultural criticism. It was through this form of critical dialectics that the more subtly concealed biases of the dominant discourse from the Scottish Enlightenment were reproduced in new forms.⁸⁶

NOTES

¹ The proliferation of scholarship on the Scottish Enlightenment over the last thirty years has been significant enough to justify itself as a new field of Scottish Enlightenment studies. However, for the limited purposes of the argument articulated throughout this chapter, I only list the most relevant and recent works. See David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993); Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory of The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); Charles Camie, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983); Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); John Clive, 'The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance', in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement: Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Nicholas Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), pp. 225-44; Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of early Eighteenth century Scottish Culture', in *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, ed. by Roger Mason (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), pp. 226-47; Nicholas Phillipson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 19-40; Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

² The most comprehensive archival study of these sites of intellectual sociability in eighteenth-century Edinburgh has been undertaken by D.D. McElroy. See D.D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement: A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1969).

³ For a specific articulation of the social characteristics of Habermas's bourgeois Enlightenment model see *Structural Transformation*, pp. 67-88. Habermas relies heavily on the continental models of France and Germany to outline the intellectual formation of bourgeois sociability in the eighteenth century. This continental, and more specifically Kantian, bias in part vindicates my use of the Scottish Enlightenment as a case study, which in its various institutional characteristics was much closer to its continental counterparts than was the case of contemporary intellectual formations in England.

⁴ For a recent discussion of the cultural politics of the often overlooked Glasgow component of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Roger Emerson, 'Politics and the Glasgow Professors, 1690-1800', in *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, ed. by Andrew Hook and Richard Sher (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 1995), pp. 21-39.

⁵ John Dwyer, 'Introduction--"A Peculiar Blessing": Social Converse in Scotland from Hutcheson to Burns', in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth Century Scotland*, ed. by John Dwyer and Richard Sher (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1992), p. 6.

⁶ Nicholas Phillipson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, pp. 19-40 (p. 22). For a good selection of articles from the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, as well as an illuminating introduction by Professor Angus Ross, see Richard Addison and Joseph Steele, *Selections From the Tatler and the Spectator*, ed. by Angus Ross (London: Penguin English Library, 1982).

⁷ See Roger Emerson, 'Did The Scottish Enlightenment Emerge In An English Cultural Province?', *Lumen*, 14 (1994), 1-24; and Nicholas Phillipson, 'Culture and Society in the Eighteenth Century Province: A Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *The University in Society*, ed. by Lawrence Stone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 407-48.

⁸ David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth Century Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 78.

⁹ Of course I am omitting the significant role played by Scotland's other two ancient universities in this largely urban lowland movement of the Enlightenment literati. Both St Andrews and Aberdeen universities contributed to the unique disciplinary innovation that marked the Enlightenment across Scotland.

¹⁰ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 42.

¹¹ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 42.

¹² Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 43.

¹³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 43.

¹⁴ In this transmission from elite moral philosophy to bourgeois journalism we witness a crucial stage of the relationship between the ideological and physical construction of cultural discourse in the early eighteenth-century British public sphere. As Lawrence Klein has observed: 'Whereas Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, in the *Tatler* and *Guardian* as much as in the *Spectator*, used the resources of print culture to disseminate polite moralism to a broad audience, Shaftesbury was, much more, the philosopher of politeness, aiming at an intellectual and social elite.' See Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 2.

¹⁵ See Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Hutcheson is properly considered as the 'father of the Scottish Enlightenment'. He was a prolific early contributor to the Scottish component of a wider European 'republic of letters' who pioneered a new style of lecturing in academic moral philosophy in the Scottish university. For provocative studies of Hutcheson's key intellectual role, see G.E. Davie, 'Hume, Reid and the Passion for Ideas', in *A Passion for Ideas: Essays on the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Murdo Macdonald, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), pp. 1-20; and Thomas Miller, 'Francis Hutcheson and the Civic Humanist Tradition', in *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, pp. 40-55. For a recently published collection of his most important writings, some of which were based on the notes from his famous moral philosophy lectures at Glasgow University, see Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Robin Downie (London: Everyman, 1994).

¹⁷ See Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 176.

¹⁸ See Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 176.

¹⁹ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture', p. 234.

²⁰ See *Structural Transformation*, pp. 103-4.

²¹ Clive, 'The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance', p. 229; p. 237.

²² See Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 24-5. For a study with a primary focus on this generational dynamic in the Scottish Enlightenment, see Charles Camic's *Experience and Enlightenment*.

²³ For a compelling argument concerning Blair's place as a founder of the modern discipline of English Literature, see Neil Rhodes, 'From Rhetoric to Criticism', in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 22-36.

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- ²⁴ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 29.
- ²⁵ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 35.
- ²⁶ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 30-2.
- ²⁷ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 50-1.
- ²⁸ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 52-3.
- ²⁹ See Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 133-37; and *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, pp. 305-12.
- ³⁰ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 54.
- ³¹ See John McIntosh, 'The Challenge of Enlightenment and Moderatism', in *Church and Theology In Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1998), pp. 32-91. See also T.C. Smout, 'Change and Division in the Kirk', in *A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1985), pp. 213-22.
- ³² See Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures', p. 305.
- ³³ Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 57.
- ³⁴ Douglas Gifford, 'Introduction', in *The History of Scottish Literature: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Douglas Gifford, vol. 3 (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), pp. 1-12 (p. 6).
- ³⁵ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 4.
- ³⁶ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 114-15.
- ³⁷ Quoted in Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 119.
- ³⁸ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 62.
- ³⁹ Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁰ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 56.
- ⁴¹ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 201.
- ⁴² Nicholas Phillipson, 'Scottish Enlightenment', in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. by David Daiches (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), pp. 295-98 (p. 296).
- ⁴³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 69.
- ⁴⁴ Sher, *The Church and the University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 61-2.
- ⁴⁵ George Pottinger, *Heirs of The Enlightenment: Edinburgh Reviewers and Writers, 1800-1830* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992), p. 47.

⁴⁶ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 69-71.

⁴⁷ The mid-eighteenth century was a period when the bourgeois public sphere in London was producing a number of mediating cultural responses to the great social instability that accompanied the rise of a consumer society. This was particularly evident in the enthusiastic response to works of explicit cultural consolidation like Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* of 1755, in which a new cosmopolitan and explicitly bourgeois readership sought to differentiate itself from an increasingly literate working-class one. Indeed, Johnson's *Dictionary* can be seen only as the latest and most heroic attempt to institutionalize or invent such a bourgeois literary tradition in a process that began with the moral journalism of the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and Edward Cave's unabashedly consumerist *Gentleman's Magazine*, to which Johnson frequently contributed early in his career.

⁴⁸ An interesting anecdotal account of a typical meeting at the Speculative Society can be found in Sir Derek Dunlop's contribution to the society's bicentenary publication, *History of The Speculative Society*. See Sir Derek Dunlop, 'An Evening at the Speculative Society', in *History of The Speculative Society* (Edinburgh: T. A. Constable, 1968), pp. 95-107.

⁴⁹ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 59.

⁵⁰ Of course, this kind of format could also inform an explicitly radical discourse. The leading British Jacobin and founder of the United Scotsmen movement, Thomas Muir of Huntershill, developed his famed debating skills at the Speculative Society. See W. Hamish Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2000), p. 19.

⁵¹ See Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (1802), pp. 1-18.

⁵² Pottinger, *Heirs Of The Enlightenment*, p. 95.

⁵³ See Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 213.

⁵⁵ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 206.

⁵⁶ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 207.

⁵⁷ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 196.

⁵⁹ Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 338.

⁶⁰ See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 67-70.

⁶¹ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 84.

⁶² Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 85.

⁶³ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 89.

⁶⁴ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁵ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ In this strictly cultural sense we may see the inheritors of the Scottish Enlightenment ethos at the *Edinburgh Review* as defining the rising conservative Whig consensus that achieved political dominance in Britain with the Earl Grey Government of 1830. Such major *Edinburgh Review* contributors as Francis Jeffrey and Henry Brougham served as Lord Advocate for Scotland and Lord Chancellor, respectively, in the Government that passed the Reform Bill compromise of 1832. Richard Sher projects this Whig conservatism embodied by the Scottish Enlightenment intellectuals back to the Glorious Revolution of 1688: “‘Whig conservatism,’ is used both formally, in the sense of support for the status quo as such, and substantively, in the special eighteenth-century British sense of veneration for order and orders grounded in the constitution that was thought to have been secured and perfected following the ‘Glorious’ Revolution of 1688-1689.” See Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 67-8.

⁶⁹ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 121.

⁷⁰ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 151.

⁷¹ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 166.

⁷² See Philip Flynn, ‘On Morals’, in *Enlightened Scotland: A Study and Selection of Scottish Philosophical Prose from the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. by Philip Flynn (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992), p. 126.

⁷³ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 185.

⁷⁴ David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 192.

⁷⁵ Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 195.

⁷⁶ Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 196.

⁷⁷ Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 233-34.

⁷⁸ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 136.

⁸⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, ‘Scottish Enlightenment’, p. 298.

⁸¹ Quoted in Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 50.

⁸² See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 50.

⁸³ See Pottinger, *Heirs of Enlightenment*, p. 116.

⁸⁴ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 50.

⁸⁶ David Allan traces this evolving discourse in the concluding chapter of *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* entitled “‘Signs of the Times’: The End of Enlightenment’. He argues that the pessimistic post-Enlightenment reaction to the dominant discourse of political economy and sociological history from the high Enlightenment period served to entrench a peculiarly Scottish prophetic moral intellectual tradition well into the nineteenth century: ‘... the crowded agendas of nineteenth-century European political and social discourse... were profoundly affected by the continuing if sometimes misconstrued influence of Scottish teachings as popularized by men like Sir William Hamilton and Dugald Stewart. Literature, ideas, and intellectual programmes, then, remained Scotland’s most durable and most valuable exports in the nineteenth century.’ See David Allan, *Learning, Virtue and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 237.

Chapter Four

The Making of a Radical Cultural Tradition in the British Public Sphere

The institutional origins of the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century can be traced to three political episodes in modern British cultural history.¹ A radical polemical prose tradition in Britain begins most conclusively with the pamphlet wars of the English Revolutionary period of the mid-seventeenth century. During this time a sense of collective political and social agency was articulated by outstanding prose writers like the Digger leader Gerard Winstanley and the Leveller political theorists William Walwyn and John Lilburne. This potentially transformative cultural moment, described by Christopher Hill as a ‘world turned upside down’, emerged in the shadow of momentous contemporary political events in a dynamic of ‘cultural compensation’ similar to that which accompanied the development of the bourgeois public sphere in Edinburgh out of the Act of Union settlement of 1707.² However, unlike the displacement of political practices that defined the emergent post-1707 civil society in Enlightenment Edinburgh as above all a *cultural* surrogate for a political authority now emanating from London, what became the radical plebeian public sphere was from its inception marked directly by political struggle. Out of this political and social conflict of the 1640s and 1650s the first examples of a truly radical cultural criticism emerged; a counter-hegemonic discourse that reflected the spontaneous, provisional public sphere then being constructed in Revolutionary England when press censorship mechanisms were either lifted or rendered inoperable.

A second crucial episode in the establishment of a distinctive plebeian public sphere occurred a century later during the cultural upheaval both in and outwith London that accompanied the public prosecution of the radical Whig agitator John Wilkes in the 1760s. The extensive network of political protest that emerged in England soon after Wilkes’s

prosecution led to the creation of the first truly broad-based, culturally differentiated national political movement; ranging on the one hand from the constitutionally minded radicalism of Wilkes's middle-class sympathizers in the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights (S.S.B.R.), to the heretofore excluded and semi-literate 'mobs' in greater London and the provinces, on the other. Wilkes's innovative use of multiple forms of popular expression to reach the literate and semi-literate alike helped substantially expand the communicative repertoire of the British public sphere. Through the Wilkites' strategic manipulation of symbols in their interactive media campaigns, a new popular plebeian cultural discourse was constructed. Through the movement's newspapers, pamphlets, handbills, posters, cartoons and joke-books, previously unexplored avenues of communication were opened to reveal a new and volatile popular public growing up alongside the cultural practices of the 'polite and commercial' bourgeoisie.³

The final episode in the evolution of a distinctive plebeian public sphere occurred through the journalism, popular reading societies, and organized protests of the British Jacobins of the 1790s. From the tavern-based educational groups that met to discuss Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason*, to the dedicated journalistic organs of the Jacobins themselves, a new popular intellectual syntax was being formed. This syntax was transparently polemical, socially and politically subversive—and therefore often coded—and foregrounded didactically in the immediate economic conflicts of the day. Indeed, these are only some of the outward signs of the specific cultural continuities that existed between the Jacobin public sphere of the 1790s and the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere under examination in chapter six. Significant radical texts like John Thelwall's 1793 pamphlet *Politics for the People, or Hogwash* and Thomas Spence's short-lived periodical *Pig's Meat* (1793-96), were disseminated within a network of readers, printers and critics institutionally organized through radical groupings like the London Corresponding Society. Leading early nineteenth-century plebeian intellectuals like William Cobbett and T.J. Wooler were aware of their Jacobin predecessors and both

drew upon and developed the issues raised during the 1790s in their respective critical projects.

In his seminal 1963 study *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson suggests continuities in critical discourse and political orientation between the Jacobin intellectuals of the 1790s and their Leveller counterparts of the English Revolution. Indeed, Thompson seems to view both historical moments as interrupted episodes of the same radical tradition: ‘To read the controversies between reformers and authority, and between different reforming groups, in the 1790s is to see the Putney Debates come to life once again. The “poorest he” in England, the man with a “birthright”, becomes the Rights of Man: while the agitation of the “unlimited” members was seen by Burke as the threat of the “swinish multitude”.’⁴ One of the leading historians of the Revolutionary period in the mid-seventeenth century, G.E. Aylmer, broadly concurs with Thompson’s insistence on the continuities in radical intellectual practice between the Levellers and the later Jacobins, but significantly for the structure of this chapter, Aylmer also sees the mass agitation in the 1760s as part of this broad historical pattern of radical cultural politics. He writes: ‘Nowhere else before the 1760s or even perhaps before 1789 do we find the combination of radical journalism and pamphleteering, ideological zeal, political activism, and mass organization that prevail in England from 1646–49.’⁵ I will return to the cultural politics of both the Wilkite ‘mobs’ of the 1760s and the ‘members unlimited’ of the Jacobin public sphere later in the chapter, but would first like to explore the social, institutional and political continuities between the radical pamphleteers of the English Revolutionary period and the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century.

The Origins of Radical Discourse in the Revolutionary Public Sphere

The cultural revolution that accompanied the major political events of mid-seventeenth century England—like the Long Parliament, the execution of Charles I, and the short-lived republic—created a new, and subsequently repressed, cultural space in the developing

institutions of British democracy. Habermas omitted this seminal period from his narrative of the liberal public sphere, suggesting that only at the end of the century did the institutional atmosphere prove fertile enough to sustain the critical discourse of such prominent Augustan figures like Steele, Addison and Pope.⁶ This selective interpretation, like Habermas's thesis in *Structural Transformation* generally, ignores the ways in which the revolutionary bourgeois ideology of the Puritan establishment was being actively appropriated and transformed by a combination of radical intellectual dissent, religious heterodoxy, and the opening up of new channels for popular and collective dissemination through expanded networks of printing.

Some recent examinations of the early modern period correctly recognize that all the institutional elements depicted in Habermas's narrative of the public sphere from *Structural Transformation* were indeed present in seventeenth-century England. As David Norbrook suggests, the embryonic political public sphere of the early seventeenth century already contained the material seeds for its later normative development: 'There was a significant expansion in the political public sphere, especially from the 1620s onward, an emergent civil society whose means of communication—reports of parliamentary debates, newsletters, satires, and so on—circulated horizontally, cutting across the vertical power structures emanating from the court.'⁷ This political public sphere really came of age, however, only after the English Revolution's first stage, when dissident groups began constructing counter-hegemonic spaces for the resistance to Cromwellian autocracy. David Zaret has argued that this fracturing of the Revolutionary movement into multiple sites of cultural resistance provided the material basis for alternative, and explicitly non-bourgeois ideologies:

The new conditions imposed on dissent by the appeal to public opinion made divergent interpretations of ideological systems a factor of central importance in shaping the inner development of revolutionary movements... But printing's dissemination of the ideology, the universalism of that ideology, and the different interest situations of elite and mass components of the

revolutionary movement combined to create different interpretations of the ideology.⁸

This new radical cultural space developed as a by-product of the English Revolution in a manner similar to the emerging bourgeois institutions of post-Union Edinburgh; it established a parallel cultural discourse of democratic rights materially denied through the limited formal democratic institutions of the day. Thus, the discourse of the developing early modern public sphere of Revolutionary England was able to articulate some of the utopian political expectations raised—but never fulfilled—by the emergence of early modern capitalist democracy, much as the grand narratives constructed by the leading intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment were essentially aspirational compensations in a larger British context for a lost democratic agency in a local Scottish one. This structurally embedded element of political expectation in the discourse of the Revolutionary public sphere would express itself through an explicitly polemical vehicle: the radical newsbook.

The transformation of the early modern British newsbook into a distinctive outlet for radical cultural discourse was related closely to the particular polemical needs of the various factions in the extended Revolutionary period of the mid-seventeenth century.⁹ The popular and generic literary form of the pamphlet, dating back to the sixteenth century, became during the twenty years of political debate between Royalists, Puritans and Levellers an original form of cultural expression with its own polemical stylistics reflecting a complex world of readers, printers, writers and critics.¹⁰ Indeed, the texts of this provisional public sphere were able to transcend their mere commodity status and emerge as fully developed cultural products which, despite their partisan origins, could establish some normative basis for intellectual activity. As Joad Raymond suggests, this new cultural mechanism of the newsbook helped synthesize competing discourses for a society that urgently required polemical instruction as part of its necessary political education: ‘...political instrumentalism can further disinterested ends; and this reminds us that seventeenth-century Britain was a society where economics did not necessarily compete with religion and ideas, and where ideas had force’.¹¹ This description of the

communicative potential of early modern polemical discourse is instructive to any enterprise that seeks to redeem the latent progressivism in the Habermasian model of the public sphere in a more popular intellectual context. For, unlike the more insular evolution of critical discourse in the bourgeois public sphere, the institutional foundations of the plebeian public sphere in Britain were from the beginning defined by contingency, provisionality and an imperative to reach as wide an audience as possible during periods of social, economic, and political crisis. Raymond argues that it was this very sense of social instability and political crisis during the English Revolution that forced the contemporary newsbooks to constantly innovate in their editorial, publishing, and critical strategies in order to both reflect, and attempt to control, the new multifaceted cultural reality that accompanied economic modernity in the mid-seventeenth century.¹²

Another related structural aspect of this early modern antecedent to the plebeian public sphere was the progressive dialectical relationship of its prose discourse with that of the particular external crisis at hand. The compact, directed discourse of such forms of the radical pamphlet as the manifesto encouraged specific and practical engagements with issues of contemporary controversy. It is no coincidence that this period witnessed a flowering of radical political projects outlined in the manifestos and tracts of such groupings as the Levellers and the Diggers. Unlike the more politically inhibited and necessarily discursive form of the bourgeois critical essay, this distinctive prose tradition embraced and creatively responded to the transformative political possibilities intrinsic to any period of major cultural change: 'This was a general drift of newsbooks: as they became more polemically fierce, more radical ideological implications entered their prose.'¹³ Janet Lyon has argued that the genre of the manifesto has embedded in its very form the promise of collective praxis: '... it seeks to assure its audience—both adherents and foes—that those constituents can and will be mobilized into the living incarnation of the unruly, furious expression implied in the text... [it is] a genre that gives the appearance of being at once both word and deed, both threat and incipient action.'¹⁴ In explicit contrast to

the highly individualistic essay form of metropolitan Augustan ‘moral journalism’, Lyon asserts that the manifesto reflects, both in its generic structure and cultural history, the distinctive aims of collective social and political transformation in the plebeian public sphere:

...the very fact that manifestoes, over the course of their history, increasingly became documents of demand rather than of ‘reason,’ the works of anonymous collectives rather than named citizens, the products of univocal imperative rather than measured cultural criticism—all this is evidence not only of the elasticity of the public body in the bourgeois public sphere, but also of the manifesto’s simultaneous participation in spheres beyond those bounded by bourgeois social institutions.¹⁵

I suggest that this praxis-based form of the manifesto outlined here by Lyon was pioneered in the Revolutionary public sphere by the Levellers in their *Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, discussed below.

As we shall see when we come to examine the evolution of this radical cultural tradition in the Wilkite and Jacobin movements in Britain, the social context in which these new intellectual products were circulated contributed much to their tone, direction and sensibility. To properly understand the often unspoken cultural assumptions shared by key critics and their respective audiences we need to first visit the sites where the writings of major early modern political intellectuals like Gerard Winstanley, William Walwyn and John Lilburne were initially disseminated. In other words we need to investigate the crucial mediating contexts of their respective ‘print personae’.

The Revolutionary period saw the emergence of the first secular cultural criticism in Britain out of the new interpretive freedoms exercised by the post-Reformation laity with respect to Biblical prophesy.¹⁶ This new hermeneutical freedom functioned in a practical way to encourage an interrogation of the chief cultural institutions of the day—most particularly the church—through an increasingly wide spectrum of voices who were becoming more confident in the normative potential of their ideas, as much as they were unimpressed by the influence claimed by elite intellectual mediators like ministers, scholars and courtiers. In *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), Christopher Hill has observed

how this transformation in popular interpretive practice, centred around such a culturally ubiquitous text in the mid-seventeenth century as the Bible, facilitated critical intellectual practices more generally:

The Bible was the accepted source of all true knowledge. Everybody cited its texts to prove an argument, including men like Hobbes and Winstanley, who *illustrated* from the Bible conclusions at which they had arrived by rational means... They were grappling with the problems of their society, problems which called urgently for solution, and they were using the best tools they knew of... The appeal to the past, to documents (whether Bible or Magna Carta), becomes a criticism of existing institutions, or certain types of rule... The radical reply was to assert the possibility of any individual receiving the spirit, the inner experience which enabled him to understand God's Word as well as, better than, mere scholars who lacked this inner grace... for seventeenth-century English radicals the religion of the heart was the answer to the pretensions of the academic divinity of ruling-class universities.¹⁷

From the more politically advanced taverns of London, the radical printer's shop, and the popular contemporary venue of the open-field meeting—whether organized for a mechanic's sermon or a New Model Army gathering—these new critical freedoms flowed in a distinctively horizontal hierarchy of intellectual exchange, spreading from speaker to listener and back again in a changed form.¹⁸ H.N. Brailsford has observed of this intrinsically democratic quality of the discourse in the radical early modern public sphere: 'What these [the Independent Puritan groups] had in common, according to Lord Brooke and William Walwyn, who both as tolerant outsiders defended even the heretical groups on and beyond their fringe, was a habit of free discussion, which included the practice of questioning the preacher after his discourse.'¹⁹ Indeed, much can be learned about the tone and quality of the writings of Winstanley, Walwyn and Lilburne from a closer examination of these primary public sites of early modern discourse.

The public sphere of the Revolutionary period was tilted towards a discourse that was above all politically communicative. The dominant register of the humanist prose of the period, represented by such literary figures as Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Burton, was, in contrast, densely allusive, abstract and self-consciously complex in both structure and rhetorical strategy. It was intended for contemplation in quiet isolated repose by a

learned minority of the literate population.²⁰ Its target readership was a prototypical model of bourgeois cultural self-fashioning: the Renaissance humanist literati. The readership—or to put it more accurately—the *audience* for radical prose fundamentally lacked the classical learning that such humanist works demanded.²¹

Indeed, the oral roots of plebeian critical prose from the early nineteenth century should be seen as the historical extension of the alternative social world of the Independent tavern, dissenting pulpit and radical political assembly. The context for the discourse of the Leveller movement in the early modern public sphere reflected this social reality.²²

Organized loosely but with an underlying political orientation, Leveller intellectuals crafted a provisional prose style that was both programmatic and conversational. Brailsford compellingly describes the Leveller critic John Lilburne's prose style as coming to life out of a cultural atmosphere where self-education and political polemic mixed freely with clear-headed social observation and sweeping, passionate denunciation:

He wrote rapidly, much as he might have talked in a rambling monologue among his followers in the Windmill Tavern.... His style, when he writes about ideas, is often clumsy, for his wordy sentences are apt to be both ill-organised and of interminable length; yet when he turns on the next page to a concrete subject he will manage to be admirably simple and direct, so that something of his militant and dynamic personality always emerges.... The reader must listen to this eager, vehement voice, sure of itself and full of its theme.... He harangued the citizens with his head in the pillory: from his prisons he addressed them in vehement pamphlets, printed somehow without the censor's licence. In these he was rapidly educating himself no less than his readers, and hurrying, as experience opened his eyes, from one advanced position to another.²³

Brailsford's description of this evolving Revolutionary prose discourse could be applied, without much revision, to the critical voice of William Cobbett, perhaps the most dominant and representative of the early nineteenth-century plebeian intellectuals.²⁴ In response to the jailing of Lilburne in 1646 the leading intellectuals of the Leveller movement crafted a manifesto that neatly parallels its bourgeois counterpart from the Moderate literati of the Scottish Enlightenment a century later, 'The Reasons of Dissent', discussed in the previous chapter. A brief discussion of the Leveller manifesto, *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand*

Citizens, may help to more clearly distinguish between the fundamentally differing ideological assumptions animating critical discourse in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres.

A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens usefully compresses the most salient aspects of the Revolutionary public sphere into a single representative document. Like ‘The Reasons of Dissent’, the *Remonstrance* was composed collectively by the most prominent radical pamphleteers of the period—including William Walwyn and Richard Overton—in a self-conscious expression of intellectual agency.²⁵ Also similar to ‘The Reasons of Dissent’, it was an explicit expression of Leveller ideology, albeit one in opposition to a more socially and politically ascendant conservative Puritan one. The July 1646 publication of the *Remonstrance* marked a watershed in English polemical literature. As well as being a founding document, along with the *Agreement of the People*, of radical British political theory, it appropriated, in the name of its ‘many thousand citizens’, a democratic efficacy denied to the vast majority of craftsmen and small tradesmen that made up the Parliamentary New Model Army.²⁶ The Leveller manifesto was a model of its genre, and in staking out ground in clear moral opposition to the emerging consensus of elite compromise that would define the Commonwealth settlement, it articulated a radical alternative political vision that exemplifies some of the best aspects of an oppositional plebeian cultural discourse. Janet Lyon comments on the powerful sense of oppositional subjectivity created by this kind of radical cultural discourse: ‘In shifting the cultural position of a marginalized group, the manifesto yields an alternative historical narrative, one that foregrounds the group’s grievances and thereby struggles squarely within but also in opposition to a culture’s foundational narratives.’²⁷

Ostensibly a polemic addressed to the House of Commons in protest at the House of Lords’ democratic legitimacy, it communicates a disdain for the exclusive rights of Peer and Parliamentarian alike. The speakers in the manifesto question the validity of a political settlement that ignores the political rights, intellectual freedoms, and most importantly, the

voice of the popular classes: 'But ye have listened to any counsels rather than to the voice of us that trusted you. Why is it that you have stopped the press but that you would have nothing but pleasing, flattering, discourses and go on to make yourselves partakers of the lordship over us, without hearing anything to the contrary?'²⁸ Here, for the first time in a collective, programmatic statement, is the aggrieved voice of the radical tavern, army camp, and Independent church-assembly breaking through to claim its space in the larger public sphere, on equal footing with the political and cultural elite it sought to reach with its simple message of moral outrage. As H.N. Brailsford observed: 'This was a new way of addressing the governing class. From the crowns of their beavers to the points of their swords, Peers and Commons must have trembled with rage as they read this tract.'²⁹ Significantly for the evolution of this tradition of radical discourse, the Leveller manifesto also speaks of economic and social grievances in a manner that personalizes an often abstract debate in the context of its own Biblically inspired moral narrative: 'Ye know also imprisonment for debt is not from the beginning. Yet ye think not of these many thousand persons and families that are destroyed thereby. Ye are rich and abound in goods and have need of nothing; but the afflictions of the poor—your hunger-starved brethren—ye have no compassion of.'³⁰ Here we can see in the context of Habermasian communicative theory a distinctive plebeian claim for political and cultural normativity. Out of the abstractions of much political writing from the period emerges this simple, direct, and polemically transparent statement of moral dissatisfaction; one that, despite its blunt dignity, clearly is distinguished by its origin in the more populist cultural 'lifeworld' of the Revolutionary public sphere.

Other characteristics of this radical prose tradition that can be traced back to its specific location in the Revolutionary public sphere are its manner of transparently linking culture and agency; intellectual debate with collective dissemination; and speech with direct political action. For the majority of the troops in the New Model Army, of which no better overall representative of the plebeian male society in England from the period can be found,

the readings of the unlicensed press by their literate officers was more than a way of keeping in touch with the latest political developments in London.³¹ It was also the primary source of their evolving conception of culture more generally.³² This social dimension of the Revolutionary public sphere is crucial in establishing the collective subjectivity of this plebeian critical tradition: 'This collective consciousness must have had a visible expression, an audible tone of voice in an army of volunteers who came together inspired by the same ideals, the same illusions, the same fears and dislikes, an army, moreover, in which the discussion of politics went untrammelled.'³³ Here we can observe, much as in Habermas's description of the 'lifeworld', a radical cultural tradition rising directly out of its social context.³⁴ I am arguing in this study that it is a tradition whose lineaments can be recognized in the critical discourse of Spence, Cobbett and Wooler over a century and a half later in the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere.

The journalism of the Revolutionary public sphere continually overlapped with the public events of sermons and political debates. It is important to remember that sermons were often published as periodicals, and that the most prominent radical periodicals of the time, like the Leveller vehicle *The Moderate*, often printed verbatim from their petitions.³⁵ If we also consider that the readership of *The Moderate* consisted chiefly of London artisans in their taverns or workplaces, we can begin to see a complex public sphere develop in which sermons, manifestos, and the more innovative 'written visions' of Winstanley, were becoming part of a more formally socialized cultural discourse.³⁶

The social context of the Revolutionary public sphere, as well as the most influential works produced by it—from the Levellers' *Agreement of the People* and Winstanley's *The Law of Freedom*, to Milton's *Areopagitica*—bequeathed to early nineteenth-century plebeian criticism a number of distinctive characteristics. Firstly, it gave to the later plebeian intellectuals a powerful example of moral didacticism grounded in a popular hermeneutics. As we will see in chapter six, the abstractions of bourgeois critical discourse wilted under the moralistic assaults of Cobbett and Spence. Secondly, it gave to

plebeian discourse an ideological transparency often lacking in the idealist meditations of bourgeois criticism like Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'. Much like a Leveller manifesto, the critical writings of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere clearly signaled both political intent and material interest. Finally, the Revolutionary public sphere provided its early nineteenth-century successor with a conception of intellectual practice that indivisibly linked praxis and theory. What the early modern radical intellectuals lacked was a coherent institutional matrix from which to articulate their new critical voice. This was a fundamental handicap for progressive intellectual movements during the eighteenth century which was only alleviated (albeit temporarily), by the founding of the various British Jacobin educational societies of the 1790s, and it presented a particular obstacle for the 'mob actions' that surrounded the Whig radical John Wilkes a generation earlier. To understand the evolution of the plebeian public sphere we need to re-examine the cultural ruptures caused by these scattered political movements of the eighteenth century, and their origins in the collective grievances of the excluded, invisible and 'illegitimate' citizens not recognized by the grand political compromise of 1688-9 that largely defined British democracy until the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832.

The Cultural Politics of Wilkite Populism

Although ostensibly centered around the charismatic figure of John Wilkes, the populist political movement identified by historians as Wilkite (or alternatively, Wilkesite) had its roots in a much broader social and cultural context. In the immediate postwar environment of the 1760s, London and its surrounding metropolitan area were sites of industrial unrest, food riots and a typically populist strain of political protest that often crossed the boundary into outright chauvinism. Henry Fielding famously compressed this complex cultural and political phenomenon in a contemporary description as 'the fourth estate; the Mob' — a social force powerful enough to function as an unofficial part of Britain's evolving democracy in the eighteenth century.³⁷

Despite its manipulation by political figures like Wilkes, it is important to keep in mind that the mass constituency of this form of domestic unrest was responding to a wide variety of social issues personally experienced in the massive economic transformations of the period, including hunger, job displacement and a lack of adequate shelter.³⁸ Indeed, E.P. Thompson reminds modern readers of the underlying normative aspirations often contained within that approximate, pejorative concept of the ‘mob’: ‘In considering only this one form of “mob” action we have come upon unsuspected complexities, for behind every such form of popular direct action some legitimizing notion is to be found.’³⁹ Significantly for the historical progression of this chapter, Thompson goes on to describe the Wilkite mob as a more inchoate and ideologically diffuse politico-cultural entity than its later Jacobin and Radical successors. However, he clearly notes its family resemblance to the later mass Radical agitations of the early nineteenth century: ‘In a sense, this was a transitional mob, on its way to becoming a self-conscious Radical crowd; the leaven of Dissent and of political education was at work, giving to the people a predisposition to turn out in defence of popular liberties, in defiance of authority and in “movements of social protest, in which the underlying conflict of poor against rich... is clearly visible...”’⁴⁰ A more articulate and organized section of the Wilkite populist movement consisted of the growing lower-middle classes in the exploding sections of metropolitan London: the parishes of Shadwell, Wapping, and St. George in the east, stretching into Surrey and Middlesex at the outskirts. Perhaps a more detailed social breakdown of Middlesex — Wilkes’s contested parliamentary constituency of 1768 — will help uncover this new, highly variegated cultural phenomenon of urban populism that played such an important part in the broader development of plebeian radicalism.

George Rudé’s definitive study of the Wilkite movement, *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Survey* (1962), locates in the demographic breakdown of postwar Middlesex an essential aspect of this new populist formation.⁴¹ The cultural energy and social diversity of the Wilkite movement in areas like Middlesex was the inevitable political accompaniment

to the commercialization and expansion of metropolitan London as an emerging world industrial centre. Indeed, some sections of the movement included the 'foot soldiers' in the new social machine of industrialism: warehousemen, riverside workers, coal heavers, silk weavers, tanners, hatters and journeymen—the broadly plebeian social grouping symbolically appropriated by Wilkes in his famous court appearance of 1763 as 'the inferior class of people'.⁴² A further portion of the movement came from the prosperous commercial middle-classes who gathered in new political pressure groups like the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights (S.S.B.R.). This organization provided the necessary institutional coherence for what was an otherwise diffuse plebeian populism, and hence played an essential part in the development of a radically based, popular public sphere.⁴³

The importance of this form of cultural praxis in the 1760s lies in its unprecedented fusion of middle-class constitutional agitation with a populist economic resentment made manifest in extra-parliamentary action. The largely middle-class S.S.B.R. was essential to the development of British civil society in a more general sense. This organization was extremely effective in articulating the more abstract political issues associated with the Wilkite movement. The radical Whig orientation of the S.S.B.R. lent the Wilkite movement an historical, even mythical, sense of the progression of individual liberties, and in some important organizational respects anticipated the intellectual radicalism of the Jacobin London Corresponding Society of the 1790s.⁴⁴ The cultural historian Linda Colley has suggested that a popular alternative English political narrative was being fashioned by the Wilkite radicals of the S.S.B.R.:

For hard-line supporters of Wilkes, those lawyers, professionals, retail tradesmen and would-be gentlemen who joined the S.S.B.R., or organized his power base in London and Middlesex, or maintained its outposts in the great provincial cities, this version of the English past and the English present was chiefly valuable as a means of validating their radical aspirations for the future.⁴⁵

Indeed, this mythical self-fashioning would become a salient feature of radical plebeian discourse, moving critics like Cobbett and Spence to envision a distinctly British (or more accurately, English) pre-industrial Arcadian utopia in sharp moral contrast to the abstracting, speculative economic realities of early nineteenth-century capitalism. What made the Wilkite protest so disturbing to traditional Establishment intellectuals in the mid-eighteenth century was the way in which Wilkes was able to re-invent the nature of political discourse in the wider British public sphere through the manipulation of his own image in the rapidly expanding popular media. This pioneering example of self-promotion would be followed by the radical publicists of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere, most particularly in the cultural politics deployed by Spence, Wooler and Cobbett to communicate their underlying political messages to a popular public with varying degrees of literacy.

A central component of the cultural politics of the Wilkite movement was the presentation of Wilkes as a new kind of popular hero through both his own writings and the abundance of associated popular memorabilia created in his image. Wilkes seemed to implicitly understand the strategic importance of timing and image-manipulation in the increasingly mass mediated world of mid-eighteenth century Britain. At the heart of his strategy was a determination to undermine what he considered to be the cultural authority of the ruling politics of oligarchy represented by the court of George III and his supporting intellectual apparatus in the Establishment journals and papers.⁴⁶ Wilkes's primary weapons in this populist assault on the ruling political and cultural consensus were not simply the traditional ones of public oratory, but also his shrewd use of the power of written ideas and images, only partially veiled as 'journalism' but really consisting of an imaginative mixture of propaganda, satire and popular comedy. As H. T. Dickinson has observed: 'Wilkes himself exploited the press to an astonishing extent. He used newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, handbills, posters, ballads, verse, cartoons and even joke books to publicize his activities.'⁴⁷ Again, this explicitly political use of popular

tropes and satirical imagery anticipated the popular Radical satires of the early nineteenth century from the cartoons of George Cruickshank and William Hone, to the satiric verse of John Wolcot.⁴⁸ In many respects this cultural strategy stretched the definition of journalism to include transparently polemical messages. (Indeed, this innovation did not leave an entirely progressive legacy. Any alert cultural historian will be able to draw a direct line from Wilkes's journalistic innovations in the 1760s to the reactionary, xenophobic, and anti-European ideology animating the cultural politics of the Murdoch tabloid press of the 1980s and 1990s.) Part of this cultural project was necessarily strategic: Wilkes deployed the full range of the contemporary media of the period in order to communicate his populist message to as wide an audience as possible. Indeed, Wilkes's publication, *English Liberty Established*, became the most popular single piece of propaganda of the period, anticipating the mass popularity of Cobbett's *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland* (1829)—by far the best selling of all of Cobbett's publications during his lifetime.⁴⁹ Wilkes's paper, *The North Briton*, is a useful example of this deft exploitation of the still undefined cultural boundaries of the public sphere in mid eighteenth-century Britain.

London in the 1760s was exploding with journals and magazines covering almost every political, cultural and social section of the mass literate public. In this broad journalistic spectrum the readership of a particular newspaper or magazine often reflected very specific class and political distinctions. An illuminating example of this fragmented public sphere were the sharply contrasting cultural assumptions held by Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*, a journal aimed at the self-consciously aspiring polite bourgeoisie to which Samuel Johnson frequently contributed, and *The North Briton*, Wilkes's newspaper and political vehicle.

The *Gentleman's Magazine* was a pioneering bourgeois monthly that sought to inform an increasingly sophisticated consumer society with all the important political, social and cultural issues of the day. It cultivated a cultural identity of broad liberal tolerance and

political agnosticism, directing its audience towards a general attitude of bourgeois utility in a rapidly changing world.⁵⁰ As Marilyn Butler has noted, the political stance of the '*Gent's Mag*', as it was nicknamed, anticipated the limited oppositional liberalism of the growing bourgeois public sphere that the *Edinburgh Review* would inherit in the nineteenth century: 'Without having a radical editorial stance, the *Gent's Mag* managed by its very representativeness to reflect middle-class attitudes that could become egalitarian and oppositional (in relation to an aristocratic government) in the last three decades of the century.'⁵¹ At the other end of the mid-eighteenth century British public sphere stood *The North Briton*, a periodical which catered to a distinctly lower middle-class London readership.⁵² Founded as an oppositional organ to counter the short lived pro-government paper *The Briton* edited by the Scottish novelist Tobias Smollett, *The North Briton's* ostensible journalistic mission was to fulminate against a growing Anglo-Scottish, or British, elite cultural discourse begun by the *Critical Review*—also under Smollett's editorship—that would reach its apex in the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* fifty years later.⁵³ In deliberate contrast to the practiced attempts at objectivity in this maturing bourgeois public sphere, Wilkes used a sensationalist critical voice to satirize the contemporary efforts of then first minister Lord Bute to absorb the Scottish political elite and further consolidate the constitutional reform initiated by the Act of Union in 1707 into a unitary, cosmopolitan British state.

In contrast to leading bourgeois intellectuals like Samuel Johnson, Wilkes implicitly understood the necessity for intellectual compression in order to communicate to this new, explicitly politicized mass audience. As George Nobbe suggests of this quality in the discourse of *The North Briton*: '...the authors had practical knowledge of the aphorism of crowd psychology which holds that such broad overemphasis is necessary to the success of any cause requiring mass action.'⁵⁴ Wilkes's deliberately provocative cultural strategy was twofold: to test the liberality of the current libel laws, and in the process interrogate the then ambiguous notion of 'the freedom of the press'; and to contrast *The North Briton's*

polemical, populist voice with the more benign, elitist postures of journals like the *Critical Review* and *Gentleman's Magazine*. Here was the initial cultural rupture in the British public sphere that would re-appear again in the 1790s with the intellectual strategies of the London Corresponding Society and the gleefully anti-Burkean 'swinish' journals like *Pig's Meat* and *Hog's Wash*.

Wilkes's imprisonment in 1763 for libel after the publication of a symbolically provocative anti-Jacobite 'no. 45' issue of *The North Briton*, turned into an ideal opportunity for the exploitation of popular discontent. Following the strategy of the Leveller manifesto in defence of an imprisoned Lilburne in *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, Wilkes transformed his arrest into a major public issue by publishing an account of his imprisonment and outlining his case against the current Government.⁵⁵ He fled to France only to continue to orchestrate a multimedia campaign from across the Channel through a constant stream of pamphlets, cartoons, political slogans and other journalistic ephemera.⁵⁶ Interestingly, one of the figures often portrayed in the prints associated with the Wilkite cause was none other than the Leveller martyr John Lilburne himself. As Linda Colley has observed, this deliberate use of radical imagery was intended to emphasize the historical continuity of English radical protest : '...it was in the context of this same heroic and quasi-mythical past that his grass-roots supporters were encouraged to see him.'⁵⁷ This kind of creative historicism was part of a larger strategic use of cultural imagery unique to the popular tradition of social criticism in Britain, and was further developed by leading intellectuals of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere like Thomas Spence and William Cobbett. Wilkes's keen instinct for the mood of the mass public and his continuing awareness of the social complexity of the reformist movement in his name was nothing short of remarkable, and he exploited this to run successfully for Parliament in 1768.

The campaign to reinstate Wilkes into Parliament after an unprecedented overruling of the popular vote of the people of Middlesex exhibited a coordinated strategy that would

re-appear in the popular British press at the end of the century, and was a key illustration of directed publicity, or in Habermas's term from *Structural Transformation*, a kind of 'radical' *Öffentlichkeit*.⁵⁸ For his middle-class supporters in the S.S.B.R., Wilkes could emphasize the more abstract constitutional issues at stake in his campaign. However, for the mass of his supporters that had only an approximate connection to the literate public sphere, he invented a particular idea of Englishness that would appeal to a population still unsettled by enormous social change: 'For them, the movement turned on Wilkes himself, not on his real personality or even his proclaimed ideas, so much as on his totem-like value as the personification of a certain version of English freedom and identity.'⁵⁹ Like Cobbett after him, Wilkes, through the potent vehicle of his own martyred image, gave to his constitutionally disadvantaged plebeian followers a unique sense of symbolic agency against an indifferent or oppressive elite during a time of manifest political and social crisis. By mocking the importance of elite political principles to this semi-literate mass audience—most particularly the synthetic British patriotism created over the heads of the vast majority of both English and Scottish subjects by the 1707 Act of Union—Wilkes was able to counteract the hegemonic cultural agenda of the British state with a sophisticated media strategy that was both culturally populist in its sensibility, and popular in terms of its content and reception across the country.

The Wilkite movement of the 1760s injected the long dormant radical public sphere in Britain with needed energy and purpose. What it lacked, however, was a consistent organizing epistemology grounded in a common utopian social vision. Beginning in 1789 with the French Revolution the sympathetic English radical underground in provincial cities like Sheffield, Norwich, Manchester and Leeds, as well as in the metropolitan centre of London, drew on similar themes of political exclusion and social alienation, but significantly, were able to channel this widespread disaffection into a more cohesive institutional framework for cultural expression and political change. The resulting Jacobin public sphere of the 1790s was able to transform the ideological hostility from the leading

critics of the bourgeois public sphere—and the accompanying totalitarian counter-revolutionary repression of the Pitt Government—into an alternative counter-culture of social and political discourse. Drawing on such foundational texts as Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*, radical groups like the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.) and the Sheffield Constitutional Society (S.C.S.) actively constructed new intellectual frameworks for cultural agency and political resistance that would survive and deeply influence the radical plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Some of the defining cultural characteristics of this public sphere included a revitalized collective subjectivity as well as a newly potent demotic prose style. These were utilized by its leading intellectuals—including John Thelwall, Thomas Spence and Daniel Isaac Eaton—to initiate a permanent ideological rupture in the critical discourse of the British public sphere that manifested itself in the sharp divergence of cultural criticism in the first third of the nineteenth century.

The Construction of Intellectual Community in the Jacobin Public Sphere

To properly assess this cultural rupture in the early nineteenth century we have to first understand the social context of the Jacobin public sphere of the 1790s that preceded it. In contrast to the elite societies of cultural discourse in Enlightenment Edinburgh that eventually spawned the *Edinburgh Review*, the more informal—and transparently political—gatherings of the Jacobin public sphere encouraged a ceaseless engagement with contemporary economic and social issues as central reference points for their normative critical vocabulary. The dedicated political orientation of the Jacobin public sphere served to create new, emancipatory forms of popular education in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, the radical communicative praxis developed during this time, where workers actively participated in the development of the critical discourse they both consumed as readers and promoted as activists, anticipated the interactive, materially engaged cultural praxis of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere. The highly integrated nature

of intellectual activity in the primary social institutions of the Jacobin public sphere helped to establish a new framework for the practice of radical cultural politics in Britain, where workers 'learned through direct participation in political struggles, by reading the radical press which now emerged for the first time, and by attending the popular agitational lectures of such propagandists as John Thelwall, Gale Jones and Horne Took.'⁶¹

Therefore, in the final part of this chapter I will review both the local and national contexts for the emergence of such major Jacobin journals as *Pig's Meat*, *The Tribune* and the L.C.S.'s own *The Moral and Political Magazine*. Of course, behind each of these journals were the various networks of booksellers, printers, critics, readers and political organizers that shaped its overall discourse.⁶² It is only from an examination of these discursive locales that we can uncover the seeds of the cultural conflict that would split the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century.

Thomas Paine's writings serve as a useful entry point into any examination of the discourse of the Jacobin public sphere. On one level Paine's conclusion in that seminal Revolutionary text *The Rights of Man* is merely a logical political extension of the economic arguments made by a leading Scottish Enlightenment thinker such as Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations*.⁶³ The political arguments articulated in Paine's text help to explore latent radical tensions within the bourgeois intellectual tradition whilst also providing plebeian radical discourse with a normative critical vocabulary of natural rights and social justice. What is significant about Paine's contribution to the developing stylistics of plebeian radical discourse is the manner in which the Jacobin public sphere both appropriated and assimilated his seminal writings for their own emergent cultural practices. Thompson correctly recognizes the politically subversive aspects contained in this act of cultural transmission: 'The authorities, for their part, saw Paine's latest offence as surpassing all his previous outrages; he had taken the polite periods of the comfortable Unitarian ministers [in the *Age of Reason*] and the skepticism of Gibbon, *translated them into literal-minded polemical English*, and thrown them to the groundlings' (emphasis

added).⁶⁴ According to Thompson, this radical appropriation and ultimate transcendence of the language of bourgeois constitutionalism was the inevitable outcome of the encounter between the restless intellectual skepticism of British thought in the late eighteenth century and the contemporary ideological atmosphere of social and political revolution in Europe:

In the years between 1770 and 1790 we can observe a dialectical paradox by means of which the rhetoric of constitutionalism contributed to its own destruction or transcendence.... The first reaction was to criticize the practice of the 18th century in the light of its own theory; the second, more delayed, reaction was to bring the theory itself into discredit. And it was at this moment that Paine entered, with *Rights of Man*.⁶⁵

I would qualify this observation and argue that it was the social and material structure of discourse in this Jacobin public sphere—with radical political organization and agitation at its centre—that gave this new radical epistemology its progressive momentum.

As part of the larger historical argument I have been attempting to construct in this chapter, I suggest that it was this unique structural dimension in the Jacobin public sphere that ultimately led to the project of plebeian cultural politics in the early nineteenth century; a project that sought to morally confront some of the grand narratives of British capitalism, such as bourgeois political economy. This current from the Scottish Enlightenment had matured from its status as a radical Whig *arriviste* philosophy in the late eighteenth century to become the most ideologically influential intellectual paradigm of the nineteenth century, animating the essential character of bourgeois reformist politics pursued by the British state after 1830.⁶⁶ However, it is only through a closer examination of the institutional structure of intellectual discourse in the Jacobin public sphere that we can properly appreciate the nature of this ideological conflict. I will illustrate this distinctive institutional structure with reference to two of its most vigorous and representative organizations, the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.) and the Sheffield Constitutional Society (S.C.S.).

In a reversal of the trajectory of metropolitan influence played out in the bourgeois public sphere, the London Corresponding Society was founded in emulation of an innovative provincial organization, the Sheffield Constitutional Society.⁶⁷ The L.C.S., in

both its wider aims and social make-up, represented something entirely distinct in British political organization: a strongly plebeian society with social, economic and political issues at the heart of its agenda. Beginning with its organizational structure, the L.C.S. represented a radically different kind of cultural institution from that of its bourgeois predecessors. E.P. Thompson observes of this new intellectual formation:

But there are features, in even the brief description of its first meetings, which indicate that a new kind of organisation had come into being—features which help us to define (in the context of 1790-1850) the nature of a ‘working-class organisation’. There is the working man as Secretary. There is the low weekly subscription. There is the intermingling of economic and political themes—‘the hardness of the time’ and Parliamentary Reform. There is the function of the meeting both as a social occasion and as a centre for political activity.... Above all, there is the determination to propagate opinions and to organise the converted, embodied in the leading rule: ‘That the number of our Members be unlimited’.⁶⁸

This accessibility built into the L.C.S.’s organizational structure was in sharp contrast with the socially exclusive fora of the established bourgeois public sphere in Britain, whether originating from Enlightenment Edinburgh or London. From its initial meeting in a tavern off the Strand on Exeter Street in January 1792, it was clear that a new type of discourse was being institutionalized in the British public sphere. Indeed, for the Scottish shoemaker Thomas Hardy—the first secretary of the L.C.S. and its most consistently active intellectual representative—there was a visceral awareness of, and hostility towards, the ideological limitations of the bourgeois reformist discourse of progressive Whig groups heretofore considered as allies in the radical political movement. This anticipates the ideological hostility of leading early nineteenth-century plebeian intellectuals like Spence, Cobbett and Wooler towards the language of liberal accommodation emanating from leading ‘radical’ Whigs like those associated with the *Edinburgh Review*. For the ‘intellectual delegates’ of the L.C.S., allies for progressive political change could only emerge from institutions like their own that promoted a similar accessibility and accountability to their membership. In a very real sense, they believed that their unique

organizational structure would serve as a model for the utopia to come: 'There were to be no leaders in this society, which was consciously modeled on the civil society they wished to create.'⁶⁹ In its emphasis on pragmatic political education rather than aesthetic cultivation; in its focus on everyday material issues rather than constitutional abstractions; and in its language of partisan polemic rather than 'objective' analysis; the L.C.S. both connected with and helped cohere the profusion of intellectual discourses circulating around the backstreets of Jacobin London.⁷⁰

The plebeian public sphere that was being constructed around organizations like the L.C.S. and the Sheffield Constitutional Society united the heterodox radical social groupings of urban Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. Following in the footsteps of the Wilkite movement, the L.C.S. in particular gathered into its organizational orbit the overlapping radical sub-cultures of metropolitan London:

At one end, then, the London Corresponding Society reached out to the coffee-houses, taverns and Dissenting Churches off Picadilly, Fleet Street and the Strand, where the self-educated journeyman might rub shoulders with the printer, the shopkeeper, the engraver or the young attorney. At the other end, to the east, and south of the river, it touched those older working-class communities—the waterside workers of Wapping, the silk weavers of Spitafields, the old Dissenting stronghold of Southwark.⁷¹

The Sheffield Constitutional Society served the same purpose in a smaller, more intensely industrial context of small masters, artisans and skilled tradesmen.⁷² Both societies set a pattern for the plebeian public sphere generally in their political earnestness and organizational discipline. The Sheffield Society began with a meeting of 'five or six mechanics... conversing about the enormous high price of provisions'.⁷³ It grew into eight sections by 1792, each meeting on the same night at different houses. The local meetings were fortnightly, while the General Meeting, where up to one hundred members attended, was monthly. After four months the Society numbered almost 2,000 members of which 1,400 subscribed to pamphlet editions of the first part of Paine's *Rights of Man*.⁷⁴ Compared with the atmosphere of polite abstraction cultivated at the bourgeois Speculative

Society in Edinburgh, these plebeian gatherings in Sheffield foregrounded their primary concerns in collective political dissemination and praxis.

I am arguing that the intellectual agenda of this evolving plebeian public sphere encouraged a critical practice that more closely resembles the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality from *The Theory of Communicative Action* than that of its bourgeois counterpart in Enlightenment Edinburgh.⁷⁵ Indeed, the Habermasian sociologist Mathieu Deflem has usefully differentiated between the two primary forms of communicative rationality in a manner that helps clarify the relationship I am seeking to construct between Habermas's mature, linguistic-based approach from *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and the cultural practices developing in the plebeian public sphere of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: 'Habermas distinguishes two types of rationality: cognitive-instrumental rationality, which is directed at the successful realization of privately defined goals, and communicative rationality, which is aimed at reaching understanding in social action.'⁷⁶ I would suggest that Deflem's conception of 'communicative rationality' here is a good approximation of plebeian cultural praxis as it was evolving in the Jacobin public sphere of the 1790s in organizations like the L.C.S. and S.C.S.

According to the social historian Gwyn Williams, the few rules of organization in the London Corresponding Society reinforced the overriding agenda of a transparent, democratic and intellectually disciplined collective rationality: 'Its constitution was almost *Rousseau-ist* in its direct democracy and unlimited numbers, its penny weekly subscription, local division, its members' right to recall delegates and to ratify committee decisions. Members took it seriously. When they debated standing orders in 1795, the minutes read like seminars in applied philosophy...'⁷⁷ This intellectual earnestness was combined with a polemical imperative that gave voice to experiential issues of moral injustice suffered by its particular members, both individually as proto-citizens, and collectively as a class. An eloquent contemporary witness from the Sheffield society, when

testifying at Hardy's trial, gave a poignant summary of the underlying moral purpose of the meetings: 'To enlighten the people, to show the people the reason, the ground of all their sufferings; when a man works hard for thirteen or fourteen hours of the day, the week through, and is not able to maintain his family; that is what I understood of it; to show the people the ground of this; why they were not able.'⁷⁸ With slight variation to account for the particular local context, this praxis-based model of discourse was emulated throughout the country, with the societies at Manchester and Norwich being the most differentiated.⁷⁹ The leading intellectuals that emerged from this distinctive Jacobin public sphere—figures like John Thelwall, Thomas Spence, Benjamin Flower and Daniel Isaac Eaton—reflected this wider cultural context in their respective critical sensibilities and journalistic strategies. I will now briefly review the individual intellectual activities of Thelwall and Spence below.

In their fleeting participation in the political agitations of the London Jacobin movement during the reception of *The Rights of Man* in 1792, Thelwall and Spence developed what would become the dominant pattern of intellectual intervention and critical discourse in the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere. Thelwall utilized the institutional context of the L.C.S. to develop a broader didactic program of collective discussion and dissemination. Out of the structure of the L.C.S. meeting came Thelwall's unprecedented fusion of practical political education with cultural commentary—a format later adapted by the dominant plebeian critic of the early nineteenth century, William Cobbett.⁸⁰ Thelwall both radicalized Paine's thesis of natural law by bringing it to a popular public in the taverns and meeting houses of Jacobin London, and also gave it a significant aesthetic dimension through his politically radical assimilation of the poetics of Coleridge and Wordsworth.⁸¹ Thelwall published a twice-weekly lecture in his journal *The Tribune*, and in 1794 secured—despite continual harassment from one public house to another—a physical location at Beaufort Buildings that was to become the centre of political and social activities for the L.C.S. over the next few years.⁸² According to Thompson, through *The Tribune* and his materialist revision of Paine's *The Rights of Man*,

appropriately entitled *The Rights of Nature*, Thelwall gave the Jacobin public sphere its complex ideological identity. It was an identity generated from the specific political situation of radical agitation in the mid 1790s in Britain, precariously balanced between outraged rhetorical defiance and resigned submission:

We can say that Thelwall offered a consistent ideology to the artisan.... Thelwall took Jacobinism to the borders of Socialism; he also took it to the borders of revolutionism. The dilemma here was not in his mind but in his situation: it was the dilemma of all Radical reformers to the time of Chartism and beyond. How were the unrepresented, their organisations faced with persecution and repression, to effect their objects?... It was this predicament which was to face him (and subsequent reformers) with the choice between defiant rhetoric and capitulation.⁸³

This ‘predicament’ became inscribed into the very sensibility of plebeian intellectual practice in the early nineteenth century. It influenced the development of a unique rhetorical stylistics; one that mixed a defiant sarcasm with moral pessimism, and an intellectual self-confidence bordering on demagoguery with often simple appeals for material and moral support.

Perhaps a more lasting influence on the content and structure of nineteenth-century plebeian criticism can be found in the work of its most radical voice: the utopian bookseller Thomas Spence. Unlike Thelwall, a sometime companion of Coleridge and the other bourgeois intellectuals of the Romantic avant-garde, Spence deliberately rejected any critical strategy that smacked of cultural elitism.⁸⁴ His conception of a plebeian public sphere drew on all the available forms of communication for the widest possible dissemination of his ‘Plan’ — a detailed blueprint for the coming agrarian socialist utopia in Britain.⁸⁵ Even in the title of his most lasting critical vehicle, the penny weekly *Pig's Meat, or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, Spence transformed Burke’s epithet for the collective plebeian political movement into a call for mass education and literacy.⁸⁶ Like Wilkes before him and Cobbett after, Spence strategically utilized a wide variety of popular media to communicate his social vision: coins, chapbooks, handbills, broadsheets, songs, allegorical maps, chalk graffiti and pamphlets were sold and distributed, often personally.⁸⁷ Indeed, from a

contemporary description by the leading Radical satirist William Hone, we appreciate the striking contrast between Spence's (literally) mobile and provisional public sphere and that of its bourgeois counterparts in the polite salons and debating societies of Enlightenment Edinburgh: 'His "vehicle"... was very like a baker's close barrow, the pamphlets were exhibited outside, and when he sold one he took it from with-in, and handed and recommended others with strong expressions of hate to the powers that were, and prophecies of what should happen to the whole race of "Landlords".'⁸⁸ Spence occupied a space on the radical fringes of the London Corresponding Society and took advantage of this intellectual marginalization to develop Paine's social theories into an original discourse of plebeian radicalism. From his 'Spensonian' society, founded at a tavern 'free-and-easy' in 1801, to his widely diffused prophecy of imminent revolution, he was perhaps the most distinctive intellectual precursor to the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century. As the labour historian John Belchem has observed: 'More conscious than Paine of the politics of language, it was Spence who did most to extend debate to members unlimited, using the linguistic and literary genres of the vulgar, poor and semi-literate.'⁸⁹

The Spenceans play an important transitional role between the demise of the Jacobin public sphere at the turn of the century and the beginnings of a self-consciously radical plebeian public sphere with Cobbett's charged advocacy of Francis Burdett's parliamentary campaign in 1804.⁹⁰ Indeed, there is a good argument to be made for a continuous intellectual 'counter-tradition' in the British public sphere that includes leading Jacobin groups like the L.C.S. at the onset of the Pittite counter-revolution in 1796, continues with the Spenceans in the period after 1801, gathers force with Cobbett's newly radicalized *Political Register* in 1804, and matures through key periods like the Luddite crisis of 1810-12, until it is joined after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 by Owenite and ultra-Radical periodicals like Richard Carlile's *Republican*, John Wade's *Gorgon*, and T.J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf* — the key journals during the crucial years of industrial resistance in the postwar period. The cultural historian Iain McCalman has developed a provocative thesis

of this trajectory as a culturally coherent ‘radical underworld’ that included all these prominent radical intellectuals and periodicals.⁹¹ As I shall discuss in more detail in chapter six, it is a very short conceptual leap from McCalman’s ‘radical underworld’ to a that of a radical plebeian public sphere.⁹²

E.P. Thompson sees the massive technological transformation of the Industrial Revolution in the early nineteenth century as *the* galvanizing factor in the emergence of an oppositional plebeian public sphere out of the Jacobin movement of the 1790s:

Almost every radical phenomenon of the 1790s can be found reproduced tenfold after 1815. The handful of Jacobin sheets gave rise to a score of ultra-Radical and Owenite periodicals.... Where Corresponding Societies maintained a precarious existence in a score of towns, the post-war Hampden Clubs or political unions struck root in small industrial villages... The Industrial Revolution, which commenced as a description, is now invoked as an explanation.⁹³

Following Thompson, I argue that the critical sensibility of intransigence and moral outrage found in much of the discourse of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere can be directly attributed to the extreme marginalization of Jacobin organizations after 1796. In reaction to official government policies of censorship, harassment and persecution, the still active Jacobin intellectuals and critics were forced to develop physically separate networks that encouraged a fundamentally antithetical discourse to that of the larger British public sphere. Abandoned by the educated middle-classes and feared by the reactionary aristocracy, the plebeian critical project became, in the truest sense of that word, counter-hegemonic, as Thompson has argued: ‘Hence, the plebeian Jacobins were isolated and driven back upon themselves, and forced to discover means of independent or quasi-legal or underground organisation... Isolated from the other classes, radical mechanics, artisans, and labourers had perforce to nourish traditions and forms of organisation of their own... it was in the repression years that we can speak of a distinct “working-class consciousness” maturing.’⁹⁴ From this period on we can date the separate development of the plebeian public sphere as it moved decisively and self-consciously away from any affiliation with its bourgeois counterpart. Indeed, any new critical strategy undertaken by bourgeois critics in

response to the cultural crisis of industrialism, especially the growing concern for ‘social aesthetics’ and the accompanying interiorization of conflict seen in the new bourgeois discourse of cultural criticism, was viewed with deep suspicion and a growing ideological hostility by these plebeian radical intellectuals.

The opposition between plebeian and bourgeois cultural politics cannot be grasped without reference to the specific power relations of industrial capitalism in a post-feudal society like Britain. Indeed, what E.P. Thompson has called the ‘dialectics of culture’ in the nineteenth century was built on a foundation of ‘specific, direct and turbulent’ social resistance in the eighteenth century.⁹⁵ He continues: ‘...it becomes possible to reconstruct a customary popular culture, nurtured by experiences quite distinct from those of the polite culture, conveyed by oral traditions, reproduced by example (perhaps, as the century goes on, increasingly by literate means), expressed by symbolism and in ritual, and at a very great distance from the culture of England’s rulers.’⁹⁶ I suggest that this symbolic cultural conflict can be most clearly located within the institutional parameters of the public sphere. More specifically, a focus on the ‘transformative ideological practices’, to borrow a phrase from Richard Johnson, of leading plebeian intellectuals like Spence, Cobbett and Wooler will aid in the development of a more progressive conception of communicative praxis than the idealized bourgeois one developed by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*.⁹⁷

The communicative praxis I am attempting to locate in the writings from the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century cannot be properly comprehended without a broader theory of plebeian cultural praxis. Craig Calhoun has developed just such a theory that overlaps with the innovative critical methodology of cultural materialism elaborated by Raymond Williams.⁹⁸ Calhoun’s argues for a new theoretical conception of the kind of defensive plebeian cultural praxis detailed in Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*.⁹⁹ He suggests the ‘reactionary radicalism’ pioneered in writings by intellectuals like Cobbett provided a powerful counter-hegemonic ideology in response to the dominant discourse of utilitarianism: ‘It [plebeian cultural experience] lacked a

general conception of itself, but it did not lack specific, symbolically articulated conflicts with another cultural and social group that it did understand to be distinct, cohesive, and in opposition to its own (individually or communally understood) interests.’¹⁰⁰ Indeed, in this ‘rebellious traditional culture’, as Thompson has called it, I argue that symbolic conflict was compressed in the writings of the leading intellectuals of the plebeian public sphere.¹⁰¹ This is why in chapter six I undertake a series of contextualized readings of Spence, Wooler and Cobbett’s most engaged social criticism. Beginning with Spence’s visionary manifesto from 1803, ‘The Restorer of Society to its Natural State’, and continuing with Cobbett’s early criticism from the *Political Register* on the new apparatus of speculative capitalism, through to Wooler’s writings on the Peterloo massacre for *The Black Dwarf*, and culminating finally in Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* series in the mid 1820s, it is hoped these readings will provide a snapshot of the evolving counter-hegemonic ideological practices of the plebeian public sphere.

The radical plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century was the immediate result of a number of profound cultural and political transformations: the spontaneous re-organization of Radical political networks inherited from the Jacobin public sphere; the massive transformation, and increasing transmission, of pre-industrial society’s traditional social customs into new, increasingly printed forms; and the diffusion of literacy into the new industrialized villages and urban centres throughout Britain. A key question in this comparative study of the rise of cultural criticism in the British public sphere is how these plebeian social developments led to a counter-project of materialist cultural criticism that had its own distinctive basis for legitimation. The social structures and cultural practices of the rival bourgeois and plebeian public spheres of the early nineteenth century each created their own utopian (and dystopian) social visions, seemingly inversely related to each other — the dynamic bourgeois-inspired commercial society of the Scottish Enlightenment versus an anti-capitalist ‘materialist Arcadianism’ of the radical plebeian intellectuals. The social context of each intellectual culture becomes a crucial clue to uncovering the Habermasian

notions of truth, normative rightness and aesthetic values as they were articulated in the ideologically ‘fractured’ discourse of the early nineteenth-century British public sphere.¹⁰²

Indeed, Thompson sees this ideological split between the plebeian and bourgeois publics as a defining schism in British cultural history of the period:

The sensibility of the Victorian middle class was nurtured in the 1790s by frightened gentry who had seen miners, potters and cutlers reading *Rights of Man*... It was in these counter-revolutionary decades that the humanitarian tradition became warped beyond recognition... Such a disposition on the part of the propertied classes was not... conducive to accurate social observation. And it reinforced the natural tendency of authority to regard taverns, fairs, any large congregations of people, as a nuisance—sources of idleness, brawls, sedition or contagion.¹⁰³

Restoring a kind of normativity to radical plebeian discourse during the vexed years of the early nineteenth century, then, becomes an associated task for this study of the British public sphere.

NOTES

¹ Both Terry Eagleton and Gareth Stedman Jones have suggested that a cultural continuum existed in British radical criticism along the lines of the one I am arguing for in this chapter. In Eagleton's 1988 essay 'The Critic as Clown' he implies the existence of a coherent radical critical tradition which was eclipsed as part of the 'fissure in the English critical institution': 'Criticism has lurched between a "professional" sophistication that sequesters it from collective social life and a political intervention into the life that, at its best (as with Milton), lends it a substantive function, and at its worst (as with Arnold) degenerates into an ineffectually "amateur" liberal humanism.' See Terry Eagleton, 'The Critic as Clown', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 619-31 (p. 623). Eagleton's description of a radical public sphere beginning with Milton and the English Revolutionaries is enlarged upon in his study *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* to include the work of the London Corresponding Society and, later, Cobbett and the Chartists. See *The Function of Criticism: From The Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 36. Gareth Stedman Jones takes Eagleton's suggestion a step further and asserts that a distinctive linguistic radical tradition existed that could 'provide the vocabulary of grievance to a succession of political and social groups' of which he includes the three popular movements outlined in this chapter. See Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, pp. 102-5.

² Using the collection of the London bookseller George Thomason as a barometer, Thomas Corns implies that there was a correlation between the massive increase in published tracts during the period of the early 1640s, which he reckons numbered around 5,000 titles, and the development of a new politicized public consciousness. Indeed, updating Hill's thesis from *The World Turned Upside Down* with a distinctive theoretical inflection, Corns goes on to suggest that during this period the collapse of press censorship was met with an unprecedented exercising of 'public reason' through this increase in the publication of writings: 'Political publication had been a prominent aspect of the work of the press at least since the Elizabethan period, but securing the opinion of the reading public became almost an obsession in the political life of the nation in the 1640s, facilitated at least temporarily by a collapse in effective measures for control.' See Thomas Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue: English Political Literature, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 2. David Norbrook's recent work on the unique rhetorical strategies of radical writing suggests a radical Republican cultural project was being constructed in parallel with the political one. See David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and David Norbrook, 'Areopagitica, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere', in *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Richard Burt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 3-33.

³ See Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁴ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966) p. 23.

⁵ G. E. Aylmer, quoted in Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, p. 16.

⁶ See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 57-67.

⁷ David Norbrook, 'Areopagitica, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere', p. 7.

⁸ David Zaret, 'Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres of England', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 212-35 (pp. 218-19).

⁹ For a good selection of the distinctive discourse of the Revolutionary newsbook see *Making the News: An Anthology of the Newsbooks of Revolutionary England, 1640-1660*, ed. by Joad Raymond (Gloucestershire: Windrush Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks 1641-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) pp. 16-17. For excellent histories recounting the development of the popular pamphlet as part of the larger cultural transformation in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), especially pp. 43-159 and pp. 636-82; and Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 18.

¹² Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 23.

¹³ Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 41.

¹⁴ See Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 14.

¹⁵ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 34.

¹⁶ Habermas describes this process with reference to the Hobbesian construction of modern conscience in *Leviathan*. He interprets Hobbes's definition of the 'chain of opinions' as an intellectually and morally revolutionary concept which reflected that private conviction was beginning to dictate public morality. See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 90-1.

¹⁷ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975) pp. 94-5.

¹⁸ David Norbrook, 'Areopagitica, Censorship, and the Early Modern Public Sphere', p. 7.

¹⁹ H.N. Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, ed. Christopher Hill, 2nd edn (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1983) p. 24.

²⁰ I have expanded on this in an essay entitled 'The Detached Reformer: Robert Burton's Melancholy Commonwealth and Utopia in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*' (unpublished research paper, University of Toronto, 1996)

²¹ See G.E. Aylmer, *Rebellion or Revolution?: England from Civil War to Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 108-9.

²² For a good introduction to the major prose of this movement, see *The English Levellers*, ed. by Andrew Sharp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²³ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, pp. 73-4.

²⁴ For an interpretation which takes issue with Brailsford's rather impressionistic description of the early-modern radical tavern, see Thomas Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue*, pp. 129-36. For the best recent study of Cobbett's critical style see Leonora Natrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁵ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 96.

²⁶ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 96.

²⁷ Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 15.

²⁸ Richard Overton and William Walwyn, *A Remonstrance of Many thousand Citizens*, in *The English Levellers*, pp. 33-53 (p. 45).

²⁹ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 99.

³⁰ Overton and Walwyn, *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, p. 47.

³¹ Thomas Corns takes issue with the interpretation that highlights the Leveller's plebeian intellectual identity: '...the Leveller movement may have articulated a programme consonant with the interests of the petite bourgeoisie, their most important spokesmen were not socially or culturally much distinct from Cromwell's circle, nor did they wish to be perceived as such.' See Corns, *Uncloistered Virtue*, p. 132. I think this rather confuses the social identity of the intellectual leaders of the Levellers with that of the predominant public sphere of which they were leading participants. It is not surprising Corns takes such a position. His remarkable study nevertheless lacks a functionally cohering theoretical framework like the public sphere which may have led him to a more collective reading of cultural politics and intellectual practices in the Revolutionary period.

³² I understand 'culture' here in its broadest material and communicative senses. The concept is perhaps best understood in this context in its Habermasian meaning as 'the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world'. I am arguing that for the soldiers, who for this purpose also represent the active hermeneutic circle of the Revolutionary public sphere, the processes and outcomes of this kind of collective political deliberation was a central part of their overall cultural identity. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 138.

³³ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 151.

³⁴ See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 119-152.

³⁵ Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 407.

³⁶ See Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 121. For an interesting attempt at tracing the evolving political theory of the Leveller movement out of the discourse of *The Moderate*, see David Brewster and Roger Howell, 'Reconsidering The Levellers: The Evidence of *The Moderate*', *Past & Present*, 49 (1970), 68-86.

³⁷ George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763 to 1774*, 2nd. edn (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), p. 7. Ironically, this popular conception of the 'fourth estate', although inspired by Fielding's reactionary political vision, is in direct opposition to its later definition in the nineteenth century as part of the formal institutions of the press by prominent contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* like Macaulay and Carlyle. In a very real sense, the difference in these definitions parallels the different conceptions of cultural praxis in the plebeian and bourgeois public spheres of the early nineteenth century under examination in part two of this study.

³⁸ This thesis of eighteenth-century cultural praxis has been most eloquently elaborated by E. P. Thompson in his studies of eighteenth-century popular culture from the 1970s, collected in *Customs in Common*. See in particular his 1974 essay 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture' adapted into 'Patricians and the Plebs', and his 1971 essay, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', both in *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 16-96 and pp. 185-258. However, it must be noted that the notion of a moral economy that was refined and specified by Thompson in his famous 1971 essay regarding eighteenth-century food riots is at once both more detailed and more restrictive than the one

I take to be exemplary for my idea of radical plebeian cultural praxis. I think Thompson's earlier provisional definition of the moral economy from *The Making of the English Working Class* is more relevant to the broader ideological framework of my argument: 'These popular actions were legitimised by the old paternalist moral economy... it endured with undiminished vigour, both in popular tradition and in the minds of some Tory paternalists... Hence the final years of the 18th century saw the last desperate attempt by the people to reimpose the older moral economy as against the economy of the free market.' See *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 66-7. For the best recent critical revision of Thompson's conception of the moral economy and community see Suzanne Desan, 'Crowds, Community, and Ritual in the Work of E.P. Thompson and Natalie Davis', in *The New Cultural History*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 47-71.

³⁹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 69.

⁴¹ Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty*, pp. 5-10.

⁴² John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 168.

⁴³ I do not believe that this middle-class presence in the evolving plebeian public sphere necessarily vitiates its essentially popular cultural identity. After all, the working conceptual framework that I have taken from Habermas stresses that the public sphere is an essentially discursive intellectual phenomenon informed by strands from across the class spectrum rather than a product of any monolithic conception of class solidarity—a culturally essentialist notion in any case, and one which has no place in the kind of speculative cultural history attempted here.

⁴⁴ The best self-contained account of this unbroken radical Whig political tradition leading up to the British Jacobins in England is to be found in Thompson's chapter from *The Making of the English Working Class*, 'The Freeborn Englishman', pp. 77-101.

⁴⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p. 112.

⁴⁶ See Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics*, p. 164.

⁴⁷ H. T. Dickinson, 'Radicals and Reformers in the Age of Wilkes and Wyvil', in *British Politics and Society From Walpole to Pitt*, ed. by Jeremy Black (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 123-46 (p. 141).

⁴⁸ For an impressive recent explication of this popular cultural phenomenon in the early nineteenth-century see Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ H. T. Dickinson, 'Radicals and Reformers in the Age of Wilkes and Wyvil', p. 141.

⁵⁰ See T.W. Perry, *Public Opinion, Propaganda and Politics in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 100.

⁵¹ Marilyn Butler, 'Culture's Medium: The Role of the Review,' in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 120-147 (p. 124).

⁵² See William B. Wilcox and Walter Arnstein, *The Age of Aristocracy: 1688 to 1830*, 5th edn (Lexington, MA: DC Heath, 1988), p. 149.

⁵³ See Audrey Williamson, *Wilkes: 'A Friend to Liberty'* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 52.

⁵⁴ George Nobbe, *The North Briton: A Study in Political Propaganda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 46.

⁵⁵ See John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics*, p. 166.

⁵⁶ See Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ Colley, *Britons*, p. 111.

⁵⁸ It is revealing that Habermas does not allow for this conception of radical publicity within his bourgeois Enlightenment paradigm from *Structural Transformation*. See Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁹ Colley, *Britons*, p. 112.

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Richard Johnson's important article, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848", for alerting me to the connection between Painite radical theory and the early nineteenth century educational function of the Radical press, particularly that of Cobbett. See Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848", in *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. by John Clarke, Charles Crichton and Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp. 75-102 (p. 78).

⁶¹ Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974), p. 180.

⁶² This kind of intellectual community served as the nucleus for the later Radical public sphere described by Richard Johnson: '... radicals made their own cultural inventions. These included the various kinds of communal reading and discussion groups, the facilities for newspapers in pub, coffee house or reading room, the broader cultural politics of Chartist or Owenite branch life, the institution of the traveling lecturer who, often indistinguishable from "missionary" or demagogue, toured the radical centres, and, above all, the radical press, the most successful radical invention and an extremely flexible (and therefore ubiquitous) educational form.' See Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge'", p. 80. This is, to my knowledge, the first description of the independent cultural institution of the radical public sphere in the early nineteenth century, one which closely approximates the concept of a public sphere as described by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*.

⁶³ Indeed, E. P. Thompson has commented on this complementary epistemological relationship between *The Rights of Man* and *The Wealth of Nations*: '*The Rights of Man* and the *Wealth of Nations* should supplement and nourish each other.' See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 97-8.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 88-9.

⁶⁶ For an excellent intellectual history describing this process of ideological penetration by the leading figures of political economy in the bourgeois public sphere of the early nineteenth century see Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834*. For a more polemical, but still valuable, treatment of the radical contestation of this ideological formation in Britain from a Scottish perspective see James D. Young, 'Cultural Imperialism, The Scottish

Enlightenment and the “Lower Orders””, in *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 11-40.

⁶⁷ See Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain during the French Revolution*, 2nd edn (London: Libris, 1989), p. 59.

⁶⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 21.

⁶⁹ Gwyn Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, p. 72.

⁷⁰ For a good anthology of these papers, see Mary Thale, ed., *Selections From the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-99* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 20-1.

⁷² Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, p. 60.

⁷³ Quoted in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 149.

⁷⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 149.

⁷⁵ See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, pp. 168-85. Habermas here uses Weberian conceptions of rationality to make this crucial distinction between the two forms of communication.

⁷⁶ Mathieu Deflem, ‘Social Control and the Theory of Communicative Action’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 22 (1994), 355-73 (358).

⁷⁷ Gwyn Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, p. 71.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 151.

⁷⁹ See Gwyn Williams, *Artisans and Sans Culottes*, pp. 63-4.

⁸⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 159.

⁸¹ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 163-66. For a comprehensive treatment of Coleridge and Wordsworth’s radical political activism during this period, see Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

⁸² See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 158.

⁸³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ For a sophisticated interpretation of Spence’s cultural politics during this period, see David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State*, pp. 59-61.

⁸⁵ The best recent interpretation of Spence’s economic project is Noel Thompson’s ‘Agrarian Radicalism: Spence and Ogilvie’, in *The Real Rights of Man: Political Economies for the Working-Class, 1775-1850* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 1-19.

⁸⁶ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 90.

⁸⁷ See John Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 23.

⁸⁸ Quoted in G. I. Gallop, 'The Man and His Life', in *Pigs' Meat: The Selected Writings of Thomas Spence, Radical and Land Reformer*, ed. by G.I. Gallop (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1982), pp. 15-16.

⁸⁹ Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 23.

⁹⁰ The best historical treatment of Spencean activity from a sympathetic cultural historical perspective can be found in McCalman's *Radical Underworld*. A more compressed historical summary of the activities of the Spenceans in the London radical milieu can be found in McCalman's 'Introduction' in *The Horrors of Slavery And Other Writings by Robert Wedderburn*, ed. by Iain McCalman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 12-21. Another good, but very brief, description of Spencean activity can be found in Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp. 88-91.

⁹¹ See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 7-73; pp. 113-152; pp. 181-204.

⁹² Indeed, Kevin Gilmartin has coined the term 'plebeian counterpublic sphere' to describe this cohesive radical intellectual formation in the early nineteenth century. See Kevin Gilmartin, 'Introduction: Locating a Plebeian Counterpublic Sphere', in *Print Politics*, pp. 1-10.

⁹³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 191-2.

⁹⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 181.

⁹⁵ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 71.

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 72.

⁹⁷ See Richard Johnson, 'Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working-Class Culture', in *Working Class Culture*, pp. 201-37 (p. 216).

⁹⁸ See Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 216.

⁹⁹ See Thompson's chapter in *The Making of the English Working Class*, 'Class Consciousness: The Radical Culture', pp. 711-46.

¹⁰⁰ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ See Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 9.

¹⁰² Habermas developed these categories to express a split between metaphysics and religion that defines for him the post-Enlightenment cultural situation in modernity. For an accessible explication of this concept, see Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', trans. by Seyla Benhabib, *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 3-14 (p. 9).

¹⁰³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 57.

Part Two

A Critical Examination of the British Public Sphere, 1802-1832

Any comparative examination of intellectual practices in the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century must address the ways in which issues of subjectivity and agency were closely linked and, at times, oppositionally related in the rival bourgeois and plebeian publics. Indeed, this investigation will necessarily highlight the ways in which the distinctive structural pressures of each public sphere produced and promoted different strategies of cultural resistance to the social crisis of industrialism. It was, at its heart, an intellectual debate over the construction of a new capitalist social order. This debate in the British public sphere, as Raymond Williams first pointed out in his study *Culture and Society* (1958), helped establish an enduring rivalry between two fundamentally different conceptions of ‘culture’, and its relationship to society. I argue that what Williams describes as the two predominant intellectual responses to industrial society in the early nineteenth century were actually determined by the distinctive structures of discourse in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres. Between an elite tradition of cultural discourse that sought ‘a recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities’ from the economic imperatives of industrial society, and a popular one that attempted to use these activities as a ‘court of human appeal’, offering ‘itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative’ to the processes of capitalist modernization, two opposing intellectual practices present themselves.¹ For the most advanced bourgeois intellectual practice in the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere it was the merging of an increasingly ‘privatized’ critical subjectivity with an inherited tradition of philosophical discourse that led to the innovation of a new interiorized cultural practice as the final rampart against the pressures of capitalist modernity. In sharp contrast, radical plebeian intellectual practice in the early nineteenth century responded to the same social crisis of industrialism with the development of an active, unified and explicitly politicized notion of culture; one that emphasized the struggle for collective economic and social rights in the face of an alienating, abstracting and elitely administered capitalism.

Before embarking on a reading of the distinctive ideological projects expressed in the discourses of bourgeois and plebeian social criticism, it is first necessary to establish a coherent

analytical model for the complex interplay of subjectivity, agency and critical identity in the British public sphere. The French cultural historian Roger Chartier has developed a useful methodology for examining the interlocking subjectivities that define critical discourse in discrete intellectual communities. He outlines a cultural space in which aspects of production, reception and presentation combine to make sense of a particular discourse:

Awareness of this enables us to describe a working space... that identifies the production of meaning -- the 'application' of the text to the reader -- as a mobile and differentiated relation dependent on variations (simultaneous or separate) in the text itself, on the varying ways that the printed text is presented and on how it is read (silently or aloud, as sacralized or secularized, in community or singly, in public or in private, with difficulty or with ease and sensitivity, on the popular level or the highly literate level and so forth).²

I am proposing that the texts under examination in this portion of my study need to be understood within a cultural matrix that simultaneously considers their own institutional histories and implicit ideological messages as well as the strategies of the respective critics themselves. This approach to the criticism of the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres makes explicit the culturally constructed nature of all discourse—particularly when broken down to the actual sites of transmission. Chartier emphasizes this cultural dimension in his particular methodological synthesis of hermeneutics and phenomenology: ‘In my own perspective, appropriation really concerns a social history of the various interpretations, brought back to their fundamental determinants (which are social, institutional and cultural), and lodged in the specific practices that produce them.’³ In chapter five we need to understand how the primary physical antecedents of the post-Scottish Enlightenment bourgeois public sphere—the moral philosophy lecture and the student debating society—contributed to the ideological limitations of bourgeois cultural criticism as a discourse of potential social transformation. Indeed, it was the residual presence of these physical spaces that fed into the development of the discursive review essay; a print vehicle that privileged intellectual abstraction over concrete social analysis and critical detachment over polemical commitment. Similarly, in the sixth chapter I attempt to illustrate how the

liberatory cultural praxis expressed by plebeian criticism was related to the organization of intellectual activity in the radical public sphere. In this sense Chartier's approach is uniquely suited to the comparative aspect of this study and its implicit reconsideration of the opposition between elite and popular culture in the early nineteenth century.

What I am calling 'intellectual subjectivity' in the early nineteenth-century public sphere was framed by the distinctive reading practices of bourgeois and plebeian audiences. Again, Chartier helps clarify how this crucial difference of literary reception played such an instrumental role in differentiating the respective forms of cultural praxis in the plebeian and bourgeois public spheres. He argues that a 'sociability of reading' that survived in the collective practices of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere stands directly counterpoised to the 'privatization of the act of reading, to its retreat into the intimacy of solitude' that helped to determine the quietist cultural criticism of the *Edinburgh Review* in the late 1820s.⁴ In a little known essay by Habermas which appeared in *New German Critique*, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism—The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin', the German philosopher draws a similar analogy between the differing aesthetic theories of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno.⁵ Recognizing the political limitations inscribed within a defensive cultural politics of reception promoted by Adorno's aesthetic theory, Habermas seems to privilege the more liberatory collective model represented by what he calls Benjamin's 'redemptive' aesthetic theory. Habermas argues that bourgeois cultural practice 'dependent on reproduction technics that prescribe isolated reading and contemplative listening leads down the royal road to bourgeois individuation'.⁶ In contrast, the 'development of arts with a collective mode of reception' like 'utilitarian popular literature...points beyond mere culture industry and does not *a fortiori* refute Benjamin's hope for a universalized secular illumination'.⁷ These differing conceptions of audience, reading practices and intellectual engagement will need to be clarified through an examination of the theory of subjectivity that animates Habermas's original model of the public sphere from *Structural Transformation*.

This examination will necessarily take up the relationship between political ideology and symbolic cultural practice. I hope to trace this relationship with a particular focus on the intellectual subjectivities and cultural ideologies that led to a decisive fracturing of critical discourse in the early nineteenth century. Principally, the German Romantic notion of 'Culture' as *Bildung*, or individual aesthetic cultivation, that was assimilated into the bourgeois cultural criticism of Carlyle in the *Edinburgh Review* of the late 1820s, will be juxtaposed with the radical plebeian conception of culture as everyday social and economic practice most clearly developed by Cobbett in his *Rural Rides* essays for the *Political Register*. Of course, such a comparison cannot omit the distinctive and divergent traditions of cultural discourse developed by the rival public spheres over the preceding centuries discussed in chapters three and four. The bourgeois narrative of culture as economic and individual development inherited by the *Edinburgh Review* from the high Scottish Enlightenment stands in profound ideological contrast to the oppositional notion of culture developed in the popular English radical tradition, from the Levellers and the Wilkites to the Jacobin intellectuals of the 1790s.

NOTES

¹ See Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. xviii.

² Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), pp. 12-13.

³ Chartier, *Cultural History*, p. 13.

⁴ See Roger Chartier, 'Texts, Printing, Readings', in *The New Cultural History*, pp. 154-175 (pp. 158-9).

⁵ See Jürgen Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism--The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin', *New German Critique*, 17 (1979), 30-59.

⁶ Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism', p. 44.

⁷ Habermas, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism ', p. 44.

Chapter Five

From Philosophical Common Sense to Romantic Cultural Critique: The Dialectics of Bourgeois Social Criticism in the post-Scottish Enlightenment Public Sphere

It is one of the central arguments of this study that the divergent cultural politics employed by the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres in the early nineteenth century were profoundly influenced by the distinctive intellectual subjectivities of their leading social critics. It is a corollary of this larger thesis that the intellectual leaders of these respective public spheres implicitly articulated through their critical strategies the reading practices, ideological formations, and political aspirations of their wider publics. To properly trace the development of intellectual subjectivity in the critical discourse of the *Edinburgh Review* we will need to return to Habermas's account of bourgeois subjectivity from *Structural Transformation*. For it is only by first understanding the complex interpenetration of public and private subjectivities contained within Habermas's theory of the public sphere that we can begin to grasp the underlying ideological agenda animating the project of bourgeois cultural criticism in the *Edinburgh Review*.

The cultural space of the public sphere from Habermas's narrative functions as an important bridge between private and public subjectivities. It is in his description of the historical transition between a literary public sphere that privileged the private domestic space of the reflective reader, and a political public sphere that sought to intervene in the wider regulation of civil society, that the specifically ideological nature of bourgeois intellectual subjectivity can be discerned. After the initial development of the classical bourgeois public sphere, where explicitly public (yet also socially exclusive) institutions like coffee-houses, salons, university lectures and debating societies acted as both the

primary media as well as the physical sites of communication, the increasingly print-based discourse of the modern liberal public sphere of the nineteenth century relied on a more privatized world of individuated dissemination and reflection—a domestic space where a ‘subjectivity originating in the interiority of the conjugal family’ began to exercise a powerful ideological influence on the direction of its critical discourse.¹ Comprehending this transition from a literary public sphere debating aesthetic and philosophical issues in explicitly public fora, to a political public sphere engaged in both direct and indirect policy-making through the dissemination of moral journalism in private spaces, is crucial in determining the ideological nature of Habermas’s theory of the bourgeois public sphere. As was discussed in Part One, however, this pattern was unique to the bourgeois public sphere—the development of alternative publics like the radical plebeian one under examination in Chapter Six suggests a reverse trajectory where an explicitly political public sphere gradually assimilated cultural issues into its discourse.

Habermas’s theory of the public sphere implies a highly individuated and universalized conception of intellectual subjectivity. This new cultural space depended on a direct, and at times seamless, connection between the privileged tranquillity of the private domestic sphere, and the political debate of the wider public sphere. Habermas writes of this relationship: ‘... there formed a public consisting of private persons whose autonomy based on ownership of private property wanted to see itself represented as such in the sphere of the bourgeois family and actualized inside the person as love, freedom, and cultivation—in a word, as humanity’.² The intellectual subjectivity based on this tranquillity of the domestic sphere functioned as a common mediating experience for the wider community of readers. This was a subjectivity that depended on a key collective conceit confusing private privilege with public legitimation. As Habermas observes, this central tension between the intimate space of contemplation in the private sphere and its encroachment by the requirements of a functioning market in the wider society, determined the ideological trajectory of much of the intellectual practice in the bourgeois public sphere:

‘This ambivalence of the private sphere was also a feature of the public sphere, depending on whether privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings communicated through critical debate in the world of letters, about experiences of their subjectivity or whether private people in their capacity as owners of commodities communicated through rational-critical debate in the political realm, concerning the regulation of the private sphere.’³ This subtle elucidation points to the ideological contradictions animating the social criticism of the most advanced bourgeois intellectual practice in the early nineteenth century. In many respects the leading intellectuals of the bourgeois public sphere based their critical interpretation of the moral integrity of society on the state of their own interior (and private) moral identity.

The new form of cultural criticism that emerged in Thomas Carlyle’s idealist meditations from ‘Signs of the Times’ was actually based on this explicit appropriation of the external social crisis of industrialism for the development of an interiorized aesthetic of moral resistance. This crisis of subjectivity witnessed in Carlyle’s intellectual practice would undermine the normative efficacy of social criticism in the bourgeois public sphere as envisaged by Habermas in *Structural Transformation*, ‘As soon as privatized individuals in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity as property-owners desired to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm.’⁴ As we shall see in the development of social criticism in the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, the inability of one of its leading cultural intellectuals to transcend this crisis of subjectivity ultimately served to undermine the parallel political project of liberal reformism that culminated with the Reform Bill of 1832.

In my approach to the intellectual practices of the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere I am following in the footsteps of Jon Klancher in his landmark morphology of critical discourse and reading practices in the early nineteenth century, *The Making of*

English Reading Audiences (1987). Klancher suggests that in this period of intense political and cultural upheaval the leading writers in a very real sense ‘constructed’ their own ideological contexts out of the chaotic field of cultural production: ‘This inchoate cultural moment compelled a great many writers to shape the interpretive and ideological frameworks of audiences they would speak to.’⁵ Indeed, in the critical readings that follow in this chapter and the chapter after it, I take as a crucial point of departure Klancher’s assertion here that the writers’ critical voices both anticipated and in a quite specific sense helped complete the dialogic communicative structures of their respective public spheres. This is particularly the case in the bourgeois social criticism from the *Edinburgh Review* where ‘a powerful transauthorial discourse echoes through its protean collocation of styles, topics, and voices’.⁶

In this chapter I will seek to navigate the variety of critical postures adopted by the leading intellectuals of the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere in their concerted attempt to construct a cultural project that would maintain the core individualist values of the Scottish Enlightenment in the midst of the twin ideological challenges of industrialism and political reform.

Intellectual Formations in the post-Scottish Enlightenment Public Sphere

The three most culturally and politically significant intellectuals to emerge out of the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere into the changed institutional world of the nineteenth century were Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, and Thomas Carlyle. Although linked by numerous minor circles in the tight literary world of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh, their principal common intellectual experience was to be found in the most powerful cultural institution of the post-Enlightenment public sphere in Edinburgh: the *Edinburgh Review*. The *Edinburgh Review* occupied an institutional space in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh analogous to that of the complex of student societies, debating clubs and intellectual gatherings of the high Scottish Enlightenment.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the founders of the journal—who were all, except for the English clergyman Sydney Smith, Scottish educated lawyers—like their Whig predecessors at the University of Edinburgh and the General Assembly, were also politically ambitious yet ideologically displaced young intellectuals seeking alternative networks of power and influence outside of the Tory-controlled Faculty of Advocates. In this local counter-hegemonic project during the dying days of the ‘Dundas Despotism’ in Edinburgh the *Review* served as an ideal ideological vehicle for liberal Whiggery. It was the quintessential post-Scottish Enlightenment institution reflecting the increasing importance of new print-based communities of discourse, as well as being a useful forum for empirically engaging with the central ideas of their intellectual forebears from the high Scottish Enlightenment in the newly transforming context of industrialism. As Anand Chitnis has observed, more practical forms of criticism increasingly replaced abstract philosophical speculation as the new intellectual paradigm of bourgeois thought in the post-Enlightenment period: ‘Hence can be seen in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* a significant debate, and a modification of a central concern of the Scottish Enlightenment in the early industrial age. Utility in the shape of practical sciences and education, was seen by the younger generation as having a more important place in society than the mental philosophy which had been so all consuming in the heyday of Hume and Reid.’⁷

From this transformation the perennial concerns of the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere slowly emerged. For Henry Brougham, despite his frequent early contributions dealing with scientific issues, this post-Enlightenment metamorphosis manifested itself primarily in his writings on mass education that led to the setting up of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK). For Francis Jeffrey this transition to the more empirical and socially relevant initially led to an explicitly philosophical attack on the abstract meditations of his intellectual forebears in the Common Sense school, Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, before maturing into a unique cultural criticism that sought to reconcile his concerns for the aesthetic development of the new

middle-class reading public in Britain with the 'enlightened' ideals of liberal bourgeois individualism contained in the best of the Scottish Enlightenment's social philosophy. Finally, with the essays of Thomas Carlyle from the end of the 1820s and early 1830s, the ideological contradictions of the Scottish Enlightenment in an age of mass industrialism and cultural leveling are most dramatically laid bare, and then promptly supplemented, by a concept of personal cultural development borrowed from another European Enlightenment tradition: the German Romanticist ideal of *Bildung* as developed by Carlyle's 'spiritual mentors' Goethe and Schiller.

To focus my intentions more specifically, it will be a central aim of this chapter to trace the way in which this dialectical transition from speculative moral philosophy to prescriptive social criticism culminated in the innovative cultural intervention of Carlyle, pioneered in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* at the end of the 1820s and early 1830s. I seek to apply Habermas's theory of bourgeois subjectivity from *Structural Transformation* discussed above to the evolving discourse of social criticism in the pages of the *Review*. This cultural subjectivity in the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere will be traced through a selection of important articles by Jeffrey and Brougham dealing with issues of middle-class intellectual development and mass education, before moving on to the essay by Carlyle that has become a landmark in bourgeois cultural criticism, 'Signs of the Times' (1829).

This dialectical reading of the critical discourse in the *Edinburgh Review* implies some degree of editorial unity and ideological coherence during the periodical's first thirty years. To consider a specific selection from the rich accumulation of articles on all manner of intellectual topics in the journal during that period, from political economy and literary criticism to moral philosophy and history, would seem, at first glance, an act of particular hermeneutic violence. However, I am not the first to read a specific thematic coherence into the overall critical development of the *Edinburgh Review*. From the first attempt at a detailed re-capitulation of the journal's intellectual scope in 1833 by Maurice Cross, to the

most recent historical reading of its ideological project during those first thirty years by Bioncamaria Fontana, scholars have always relied on some implicit editorial unities in their respective interpretations of the journal's development during the nineteenth century.⁸ What will distinguish my own reading of the journal's ideological development is the specific focus on the effects of a changing intellectual subjectivity for the creation of an idealist bourgeois cultural criticism.

In order to illustrate the relationship between the development of cultural criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* and the social dynamics of the bourgeois public sphere of which it was a product, a preliminary understanding of the historical trajectory of Scottish moral philosophy is required. The writers under examination in this section were all working, to quote the Scottish intellectual historian Ralph Jessop, within 'a common fund of philosophic prose'. As Jessop argues in his important study, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought* (1997), Carlyle's relationship with the dominant strain of academic moral philosophy in early nineteenth century Scotland is crucial to understanding the development of his pioneering experiment in social and cultural criticism: 'Many of the deepest concerns of the Scottish school [of Common Sense]— materialism, scepticism, the metaphorical status of mind terminology, and several other related issues—were inherited by Carlyle.'⁹ This observation on the immediate Scottish intellectual context engaged with not just by Carlyle, but by Jeffrey, and, to a lesser extent, Brougham, enables some explicit connections to be made between the moral failure of the Scottish Enlightenment project in the early nineteenth century, and the efforts by the leading social critics of the *Edinburgh Review* to recuperate some of its central aims, and in Carlyle's case, to reject them in favour of a more politically quietist project of idealist cultural critique.

George Davie has provided the most concise account of this dialectical dynamic affecting the trajectory of intellectual discourse in the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere. In his lecture, 'The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense', Davie argues that Carlyle's prophetic 'restatement of the alienation and atomization

critique of modern society' in 'Signs of the Times', was merely the endpoint of a long process of philosophical debate initiated by Jeffrey's empirical interrogation of Stewart's project of the moral sciences from his *Edinburgh Review* article (discussed below) of 1804: 'A chain-reaction of arguments at once was sparked off, which, lasting for some thirty years, brought in Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, Sir William Hamilton and J.F. Ferrier, all fighting for their altars and their fires, as the intellectual leaders of the Scots, against the philistine and anti-intellectual arguments of Francis Jeffrey...' ¹⁰ In my selection and readings of essays from the *Edinburgh Review* during this extended intellectual debate, I choose to highlight criticism from the triumvirate of Jeffrey, Brougham and Carlyle that most clearly engages with the major social and cultural issues associated with industrialism, and, it is hoped, will also provide the reader with a glimpse of the tactical and strategic adjustments that reflected each critic's developing intellectual subjectivity in the wider bourgeois public sphere of the early nineteenth century.

Indeed, this strategic imperative was reflected in the language of the chief editor of the *Review* during this period. Early on in the journal's development Jeffrey gave a revealing indication to one of his principal collaborators, the political economist and M.P. Francis Horner, of the underlying political necessity that animated the *Review*'s ideological mission: 'You must make our adventures and daring spirits more honest, and our honest and intelligent men more daring and ambitious; or, rather, you must find out some channel through which the talent and principle of the latter may be brought to bear upon the actual management of affairs, and may exert its force in controlling or directing the measures of government in some more efficient way than in discoursing in private companies, or lamenting in epistles.' ¹¹ For Jeffrey, the journal clearly was an invaluable ideological weapon in the broad-based cultural efforts of the time to establish a functioning middle-class intellectual constituency for the corresponding political project of Whig constitutional reform. This was an ideological agenda that required Jeffrey to develop a series of seemingly antithetical intellectual currents in the *Review*. From the many efforts

at ‘secularizing’ the discourse of political economy and Smithian industrial liberalism through the solicitation of contributions by such intellectual apostles of *laissez-faire* like Thomas Malthus, Horner, and J.R. McCulloch; to the promotion of the utilitarian educational projects aimed at the growing mass public like Brougham’s Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK); through his efforts at cultivating the tastes of an ‘aesthetic elite’ out of a growing middle-class readership created by the diffusion of cheap printed books, pamphlets and periodicals, including his own innovative literary reviews; and finally, in his encouragement to the young protégé Carlyle to ‘Germanize the public’ through a new discourse of cultural criticism, he sought to morally reform the main characteristics of early industrial capitalism from within.¹² This last project required the *Review* to interrogate from an aesthetic perspective the spiritual alienation—or ‘ideological discharge’, to use Habermas’s more explicitly theoretical turn of phrase—resulting from the Scottish Enlightenment’s economistic conception of society.¹³

Bioncamaria Fontana argues that the dominant strain of critical discourse in the *Edinburgh Review* from this thirty year period sought above all to establish a crucial intellectual constituency for the political project of liberal Whiggism. She writes of the pivotal role played by the leading post-Enlightenment intellectuals in establishing a new liberal capitalist ideological consensus: ‘It is in fact reasonable to claim that the reviewers did as much to create 19th-century Whiggism as they did to popularize it; and the *Review* itself ought principally to be regarded not as an instrument for the promotion of a clearly defined, pre-existing ideology but rather as the locus within which a new ideology was tentatively given shape.’¹⁴ In my readings of selected articles by Jeffrey, Brougham and Carlyle, I relate this larger political project to the specific development of an idealist bourgeois social criticism that sought to forge an ‘ideologically neutral’ intellectual space for its discussion of the moral and cultural condition of modern industrial society. One cannot, however, easily disentangle this parallel project of bourgeois cultural criticism from its origins in the discourse of the moral sciences in the late eighteenth century. For this

reason I will preface my discussion of these articles with a brief recounting of the principal intellectual agenda of the late Scottish Enlightenment period.

Fontana puts forth the public intellectual work of Dugald Stewart as the central bridge in this relationship between the philosophical ambitions of the Scottish Enlightenment and the later intellectual project of the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁵ The metropolitan British intellectual elite that was establishing itself in the first third of the nineteenth century through the *Edinburgh Review* relied on the figure of Stewart, the Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University from 1785 to 1810, to provide the necessary intellectual continuity and leadership during a critical transitional period. The intellectual historian Donald Winch has observed that it was ‘Stewart, more than any other figure, who acted, more or less self-consciously, as the bridge between that late eighteenth century generation of Scottish moral philosophers and the historians of civil society... and that new generation of Scottish-educated writers who founded the leading intellectual periodical of the day.’¹⁶ Stewart provided the young intellectuals of the *Edinburgh Review* with a coherent ideological and moral justification for their budding intellectual leadership in the newly expanding bourgeois public sphere of Britain.

Stewart utilized his official intellectual position as Professor of Moral Philosophy to inculcate some of the most influential values of British liberalism into the next generation of intellectuals. From his famed lectures on political economy, Stewart transmitted to his students a sense of both the moral and cultural possibilities open to advanced commercial societies depicted in such seminal works of the Scottish Enlightenment as Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Thomas Reid’s *Essays On the Intellectual Powers Of Man* (1785).¹⁷ Significantly, it was the values and ideas reflected in these works that would later circumscribe the *Review*’s leading critics in their engagement with the emerging cultural crises that accompanied the establishment of the new capitalist order in Britain. As Anand Chitnis has noted, Stewart’s analysis of the complex cultural forces changing capitalist society, both in his lectures and published writings, helped encourage the

collective intellectual response of the *Edinburgh Review* to the moral and political contradictions facing the liberal British establishment in the wake of the French and Industrial Revolutions: 'The students he taught were witnessing the questioning of traditional certainties and the collapse of political and social establishments... Stewart effectively equipped his students with responses to the new age: classical economics, moral seriousness and virtue, industry and sensibility.'¹⁸ In this general sense the *Edinburgh Review* acted as the principal conduit in transmitting Stewart's economically informed moral philosophy to a wider bourgeois public in Britain. The form of education provided by the new journal would change only slightly in light of the expanded possibilities of portable readership, and its ideological purpose would become even more apparent as a dedicated forum for privileged discourse and communication to the heroic new 'universal class' imagined by the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers: the dynamic bourgeoisie of London, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Chitnis usefully contextualizes the cultural project of the *Edinburgh Review* inspired by Stewart's teaching:

On the one hand, the *Review* believed as passionately in its own educational function as did the universities from which its founders had come. Whether the matters were science or political economy, the object was to inform the readers of the latest knowledge, to break down old prejudices and habits of mind. On the other hand, the *Review* put its faith in the new bourgeoisie, the class at the hub of the commercial-cum-industrial society which was now coming to prevail, and the class displayed all the moral virtues of industry and, helped by the *Review*, culture and liberty. The middle-classes were to become the apostles of the new progress and bulwarks against the tyranny either of the aristocracy or the mob.¹⁹

The combination of more widely diffused forms of education provided by the liberal public sphere and the increasing technological sophistication required by the expanding industrial market were to become the twin engines driving Britain's cultural modernity in the early nineteenth century. In this sense the reviewers became Stewart's moral and ideological disciples, translating the intelligence necessary for a smoothly functioning and socially limited democracy to a bourgeois readership intently keeping watch on the cultural dangers

created by this new capitalist order; not least the alienation caused by the division of labour and its potential for inspiring social revolution in the 'lower orders'.

Following George Davie's argument above, I propose that Stewart's teaching and work as a leading academic and moral philosopher at the end of the Scottish Enlightenment period provided former students like Jeffrey and Brougham—as well as his 'mediated pupil' Thomas Carlyle—with a project to both further and react against in their social and cultural criticism. In his most influential written work, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), Stewart recognized the moral challenges that commercialization had presented to contemporary British society, and proposed an accompanying project of 'moral enlightenment' to cope with the dramatic pace of material progress.²⁰ Stewart's challenge for a new project of the moral sciences was taken up by the leading critics of the *Edinburgh Review* in different ways. For Jeffrey it involved a careful revision of philosophical Whiggism through a series of long review essays that grappled with such diverse issues as the division of labour, the practical function of political economy, and the ameliorating role of imaginative literature in an advancing commercial society. For Brougham this challenge inevitably came down to the issue of popular education as the most important integrating institution for the future of a reformed mass democracy. Finally, for Carlyle, Stewart's call to 'moral enlightenment' required the invention of an entirely new cultural subjectivity; one that emphasized the interior life as a potential refuge from the alienating pressures of mass industrial society.

Jeffrey's Social Critique of Philosophical Common Sense and the Origins of Bourgeois Cultural Criticism

It is entirely indicative of the post-Enlightenment situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century that Jeffrey's first major piece of criticism published in the *Review* was an essentially philosophical engagement with Stewart's speculative system of moral philosophy known as 'Common Sense'. The so-called Common Sense school founded by the Glasgow University professor Thomas Reid provided an alternative version of

perception to the radical skepticism promoted by Humean philosophy. This crucial philosophical debate over ‘first principles’ between Humean skepticism and Reidian common sense provided the central intellectual tension in early nineteenth century Scottish moral philosophy and coloured the responses of the major contributors of the *Edinburgh Review* to the pressing concerns of the newly developing industrial society.

This conflict within ‘metaphysical Moderatism’, as George Davie labeled the broad Scottish Enlightenment tradition of academic philosophy in his seminal 1961 study, *The Democratic Intellect*, was essentially defined by an effort to establish a pragmatic middle ground between the extreme empiricism of Hume and the intuitionist tendencies of Reid.²¹ As Davie suggests, however, the Common Sense programme developed by Stewart also shared some of the central assumption of the broad Scottish philosophical tradition established by Hume: ‘Scottish philosophy owed to Hume above all, on its own confession, the conception of the fundamental role in metaphysical inquiry of a peculiar set of mental facts, intermediary between the all-embracing One of the rationalists and the fragmented and atomised Many of the empiricists—namely the *natural beliefs* or principles of common sense, such as the belief in ideal standards, and the belief in the self of conscience as separate from the rest of one.’²² This philosophical concern for the validity of natural belief defended from ‘experience taken in some wider sense,’ as Davie puts it, led Common Sense thinkers like Reid, Stewart, and Carlyle’s contemporary Sir William Hamilton, to construct a system of human perception that acknowledged man’s ultimate limitations in confronting the mysteries of the external world, but at the same time held out hope that existence could ultimately be validated as ‘intangibly significant, meaningful and purposeful’.²³ Ralph Jessop has argued that this intuitionist strain in Common Sense thought would reappear in Carlyle’s pioneering social critique, ‘Signs of the Times’; an interpretation I will engage with in further detail at the conclusion of the chapter.²⁴

Dugald Stewart’s re-articulation of this Common Sense project, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid* (1802), was more than simply a sympathetic exegesis of

Reid's pioneering moral philosophy. At stake was the moral legitimacy of the Scottish Enlightenment's ambitious intellectual project, now focused on an 'enlightened' guidance of liberal capitalism in the nineteenth century. Stewart's general defence of the inductive method was intended to function as a re-statement of philosophical first principles during a period of dramatic commercial and industrial development. Continuing in the broad discourse of the Scottish Enlightenment 'science of man', Stewart insists that progress in the human sciences can proceed only if its intellectual foundations are clarified in the same rigorous manner as the natural sciences: 'Of the importance of this undertaking, it is sufficient to observe that it stands somewhat, although I confess not altogether, in the same relation to the different branches of intellectual and moral science, such as grammar, rhetoric, logic, ethics, natural theology, and politics, in which the anatomy of the human body stands to the different branches of physiology and pathology.'²⁵ As Stewart puts it, this project intended to confirm the ultimate principle of human agency in the midst of an ever encroaching material world: 'I apprehend that the proper, or rather the essential preparation for those studies which regard our nobler concerns, is an examination of the principles which belong to man as an intelligent, active, social, and moral being.'²⁶ These were extraordinarily ambitious designs for an academic moral philosopher at the beginning of a new century, and they invited serious appraisal from a younger generation of public intellectuals in the developing liberal public sphere centred around a journal founded the same year Stewart's seminal book appeared.

Francis Jeffrey's review of Stewart's book appeared at the beginning of 1804 and crystallized the efforts of the so-called 'second generation' of post-Enlightenment intellectuals to constructively challenge, as well as to validate, the philosophical legacy of their forebears in line with the cultural realities of a new commercial and industrial age. As the cultural historian David Allan suggests: 'Scottish society was already by 1800 reeling under the simultaneous impact of several ... debilitating changes... greater economic change was irreversibly altering the agenda of topical public discourse.'²⁷ This new

context provided both Jeffrey and his intellectual cohorts at the *Review* with a unique opportunity to impose their own, more socially relevant interpretation on the chief philosophical legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment. As well as functioning as a *de-facto* ‘declaration of intellectual independence’ from his former teacher, Jeffrey’s review also helped to clarify the ideological agenda of bourgeois cultural criticism in Britain amidst the associated political, economic and social challenges that would come to dominate the intellectual discourse of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The article was published anonymously — like virtually all of the pieces in the *Edinburgh Review* during the first third of the nineteenth century — not for fear of political persecution, but because in the closely knit intellectual community of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh associated with the journal, all the contributors would have been known to one another, making explicit authorial declarations both superfluous and irrelevant. As was suggested at the conclusion of Chapter Three, although hoping to reach a growing print readership with a general circulation that extended to London and throughout the major cities of Britain, the reviewers essentially wrote their articles with themselves as their imagined ‘ideal audience’, a point convincingly made by Jon Klancher.²⁸ Equally important, the anonymous voice of the author more easily lends each contribution the status of a collective appraisal of intellectual trends, which during the journal’s first few years bears a considerable resemblance to the shared nature of editorial and writing duties by Jeffrey, Brougham, Francis Horner and Sydney Smith. Thus, at the article’s opening, Jeffrey invokes the collective critical voice, not out of any wider solidarity with a repressed and underrepresented public as in the fashion of radical plebeian intellectuals, but out of a sense of the shared ideological project being embarked upon by his cohort of liberal critics: ‘Although it is impossible to entertain greater respect for any names than we do for those that are united in the title of this work, we must be permitted to say, that there are many things with which we cannot agree, both in the system of Dr Reid, and in Mr Stewart’s elucidation and defence of it.’²⁹ With this clear opening statement — recalling the rhetorical

declaration at the beginning of a student society debate — an immediate tension is established between these young post-Enlightenment critics and their philosophical mentor that will be worked through in the argument that follows.

It is clear from this opening that Jeffrey is seeking to distance his own post-Enlightenment cultural project from the abstract and technical philosophical issues pursued by his former teacher at Edinburgh University. His questioning of Stewart's inductive approach betrays a larger dissatisfaction with metaphysical speculation generally: 'Now, in these speculations we cannot help suspecting that those philosophers have been misled in a considerable degree by a false analogy: and that their zeal for the promotion of their favourite studies has led them to form expectations somewhat sanguine and extravagant, both as to their substantial utility and as to the possibility of their ultimate improvement.'³⁰ He continues his argument by stressing the need for more tangible measures of human progress seemingly ignored by Stewart's re-statement of Common Sense principles: '... it does not appear... that the condition of mankind is likely to derive any great benefit from the cultivation of this interesting but abstracted study'.³¹ So already we have the principal revision of the post-Enlightenment reviewers clearly stated here by Jeffrey: the time for speculation has passed, and critical application in empirically verifiable fields must now direct the actions of the new intellectual leaders of British liberalism.

Jeffrey's primary criticism of Stewart in this early review concerns the manner in which the Common Sense project — on its way to becoming 'the official academic philosophy' of Britain in the early nineteenth century — valorized the systematic study of the mind over and above the attempt to aid man in his active efforts to live virtuously in the wider world.³² I suggest that this was more a revision than a rejection of Common Sense moral philosophy; an effort by a younger generation to clarify the value of their inherited epistemology for its application in a rapidly changing social and cultural environment. This leads to perhaps the most famous passage in the article in which Jeffrey criticizes the

inductive method for its lack of scientific rigour on the one hand, and its overemphasis on the systematic study of internal human emotions on the other:

We cannot decompose our perceptions in a crucible, nor divide our sensations with a prism; nor can we by art and contrivance, produce any combination of thoughts or emotions, besides those with which all men have been provided by nature. No metaphysician expects by analysis to discover a new power, or to excite a new sensation in the mind, as a chemist discovers a new earth or a new metal; nor can hope, by any process of synthesis, to exhibit a mental combination different from any that nature has produced in the minds of other men.³³

This critique of the science of mind is more than a little self-serving for a young aspiring public intellectual like Jeffrey, and allows his own intermediate function as a reviewer to be highlighted. Abstract arguments over first principles may be well and good, he suggests, but it is in the social arena of the new liberal public sphere that these ideas must finally be reckoned with: ‘A philosopher may be the first to state these laws, and to describe their operation distinctly in words; but men must already be familiar with them in reality, before they can assent to the justice of his descriptions.’³⁴ This insistence by Jeffrey that metaphysical speculation remains essentially impotent without the aid of competent interlocutors leads to his concluding point about the necessity for practical intellectual leadership.

After dismissing the overemphasis on technical issues of perception in Stewart’s work, Jeffrey focuses on his former teacher’s redeeming summary of the principles of ‘Association’. Using this older Hutchesonian concept from the Scottish tradition of moral philosophy as a guide, Jeffrey emphasizes the necessity for intellectual and moral instruction to improve ‘the creed, and the ignorance, of the vulgar’.³⁵ He relates with approval metaphysical discussion of society that seeks out a widely diffused and general intellectual improvement in line with the broadly articulated goals of the Scottish Enlightenment. For him, these kinds of abstractions are necessary aids in developing a functional intellectual critique of society: ‘... that they are sooner learned, and may be more steadily and extensively applied, when our observations are assisted by the lessons of a

judicious instructor [Stewart], seems scarcely in doubt... it cannot be disputed, that an habitual acquaintance with those [metaphysical] principles leads us more directly to the source of such errors, and enables us more readily to explain and correct some of the most formidable aberrations of human understanding'.³⁶ Here we have a statement on the value of a general culture of metaphysical speculation that unites the abstract principles of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers with the social priorities of the post-Enlightenment critics working within the new liberal bourgeois public sphere. I argue that this connection Jeffrey makes with the philosophical heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment gives a clear ideological purpose to its principal intellectual inheritors—the reviewers themselves—and should be taken as a significant early indication of their collective intellectual subjectivity in the bourgeois public sphere.

Jeffrey would reprise many of these themes in a follow-up article of 1810 on the publication of Stewart's selected philosophical writings. It will be helpful to briefly review this article as a precursor to discussing Jeffrey's other significant piece of criticism during this initial period of the *Edinburgh Review*, his 1813 appraisal of Madame de Staël's fiction. In reviewing Stewart's *Philosophical Essays* (1810), we witness Jeffrey's distinctive talent for balancing the changing fashions of elite middle-class literary taste against appeals to either outmoded or later, in the case of Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times', visionary intellectual trends. This is what Thomas Crawford called Jeffrey's 'see-saw' editorial approach in which he attempted to balance his attacks on certain literary or philosophical formations with a later appreciation for their neglected educational or aesthetic qualities.³⁷

This review of Stewart's book of philosophical prose follows this pattern. Jeffrey opens by recalling the dwindling contemporary public appetite for works of metaphysical speculation: 'The studies to which Mr. Stewart has devoted himself, have lately fallen out of favour with the English public; and the nation which once placed the name of Locke immediately under those of Shakespeare and of Newton, and has since repaid the

metaphysical labours of Berkeley and of Hume, seems now to be almost without zeal or curiosity as to the progress of the Philosophy of Mind.’³⁸ The underlying reasons for this decline becomes the subject of the review. Jeffrey’s acute sensitivity to cultural trends in the liberal public sphere suggests to him that part of the reason for this ‘revolution in the intellectual habits and character of a nation’ lies in the growing body of learning and information available to the middle-class reading public: ‘... the phenomenon... has always appeared to arise from the great multiplication of the branches of liberal study, and from the more extensive diffusion of knowledge among the body of the people,-- and to constitute, in this way, a signal example of that *compensation*, by which the good and the evil in our lot is constantly equalised, or reduced at least to no very variable standard’.³⁹ So the problem, for Jeffrey, seems clear enough: the practical mechanisms for intellectual guidance have not kept pace with the growing appetite for learning in the bourgeois public sphere, resulting in a corresponding trend towards ‘cultural leveling’.

The new proliferation of discourses in the liberal public sphere has brought with it a fundamental dilution of the kind of ‘first principles’ philosophical education Jeffrey experienced as a student at Edinburgh University. This state of affairs is outlined by Jeffrey in the article and represents a kind of preliminary measurement of the ‘intellectual condition of the nation’ during the first decade of the nineteenth century:

The progress of knowledge has given birth, of late years, to so many arts and sciences, that a man of liberal curiosity finds both sufficient occupation for his time, and sufficient exercise to his understanding, in acquiring a superficial knowledge of such as are most inviting and most popular; and consequently, has much less leisure, and less inducement than formerly, to dedicate himself to those abstract studies which call for more patient and persevering attention.⁴⁰

Jeffrey is contemplating here the cultural consequences of the newly expanding middle-class readership in Britain. He goes on to outline an intellectual prototype of this new bourgeois cultural formation, the ‘man of information’:

... a man can scarcely pass current in the informed circles of society, without knowing something of political economy, chemistry, mineralogy, geology,

and etymology, --having a small notion of painting, sculpture, and architecture, with some sort of taste for the picturesque, -- and a smattering of German and Spanish literature... over and above some little knowledge of trade and agriculture; with a reasonable acquaintance with what is called the philosophy of politics, and a far more extensive knowledge of existing parties, factions, and eminent individuals, both literary and political, at home and abroad, than ever were required in any earlier period of society.⁴¹

The self-referential aspect in this cultural profile is easy to recognize; the new man of information he is mapping here is clearly modeled on the intellectually hyperactive student of late Enlightenment Edinburgh. However, the new feeling of 'universal hurry' encouraged by industrial society, coupled with the explosion of information provided in periodicals like the *Edinburgh Review*, has also produced 'a sort of Encyclopedical trifling' that ignores the cohering value of metaphysical study.⁴² Jeffrey betrays here more than a little of his own intellectual anxiety in his attempt to balance the demands of reviewing with the more noble call of the moral sciences, a vocation 'requiring deep thought and solitary application'.⁴³

Like his 1804 article, Jeffrey concludes that private metaphysical speculation must be accompanied by a compelling principle of sympathetic association to be of any value in the modern age. Indeed, what he suggests to be of the greatest value in Stewart's moral philosophy is its social utilitarianism, those empirically verifiable standards of progress society has set for itself through the new cultural institutions of liberal capitalism: 'The end and aim of all *that* philosophy is to make education rational and effective, and to train men to such sagacity and force of judgment, as to induce them to cast off the bondage of prejudices, and to follow happiness and virtue with assured and steady steps.'⁴⁴ The object of all this general moral speculation was the enlightened British middle-classes, that dynamic social formation at the centre of Scottish Enlightenment discourse since Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Ferguson's *History of Civil Society*. For Jeffrey it was to be through the advancement of moderate constitutional reform, a more rigorous application of the lessons of political economy, and the aesthetic guidance provided by literary criticism that this class would finally achieve its deserved place at the ideological epicenter of British

capitalism. Donald Winch has suggested that this ‘belief in the mediating and ameliorating role, political as well as economic, of the middle classes was to become a major article of faith shared by the philosophic Whigs’ and the ‘expression of it in this context seems to have been the highest point in Jeffrey’s hopes’.⁴⁵

The period between Jeffrey’s 1810 review of Stewart’s *Philosophical Essays* and his discussion of Madame de Staël’s *De la Literature* witnessed great social upheaval in Britain. During 1811-12, the Luddite agitations proved to be the first shocking example of collective social resistance to the new industrial order.⁴⁶ Closer to home for the contributors to the *Edinburgh Review* were the violent New Year riots in Edinburgh that ended in the deaths of a policeman and a clerk, and the subsequent executions of three young men.⁴⁷ That same year Jeffrey was engaged in legal mediation on behalf of striking Lanarkshire weavers in the hopes of getting their wages improved.⁴⁸ It is perhaps indicative of the increasing compartmentalization of intellectual activity within the bourgeois public sphere that these tumultuous political events played so little part in Jeffrey’s most significant essay during these years; a long, digressive and ultimately pessimistic meditation on the limited state of cultural development reached by the British middle-classes during the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

The essay begins with a general reflection on Madame de Staël’s place in contemporary European letters. She is praised as ‘the first female writer of her age’ whose work has carried ‘the generalizing spirit of true philosophy into the history of literature and manners’.⁵⁰ Indeed, Jeffrey seems to be recognizing her work as a close intellectual relative to the kind of conjectural historical studies so typical of the high Scottish Enlightenment. He states that the aim of her present work ‘is to show that all the peculiarities in the literature of different ages and countries, may be explained by a reference to the condition of society, and the political and religious institutions of each; — and at the same time to point out in what ways the progress of letters has in its turn modified and affected the government and religion of those nations among whom they have

flourished'.⁵¹ This aim is premised on the assumption that 'human nature is tending, by a slow and interminable progression, to a state of perfection'.⁵²

One cannot help recognizing the cultural project of the *Edinburgh Review* in Jeffrey's discussion of the general assumptions governing de Staël's work. He writes: 'The connection between good morals and that improved state of intelligence which Mad. de Staël considers as synonymous with the cultivation of literature, is too obvious to require any great exertion of her talents for its elucidation.'⁵³ Jeffrey enlarges upon this 'civilizing' ideal of de Staël's to articulate one of the central ideological assumptions governing cultural discourse in the bourgeois public sphere:

... it ought not to be forgotten, that all men have not the capacity of thinking deeply--and that the most general cultivation of literature will not invest everyone with talents of the first order. If there be a degree of intelligence, therefore, that is more unfavourable to the interests of morality and just opinion, than an utter want of intelligence, it may be presumed, that, in very enlightened times, this will be the portion of the greater multitude,-- or at least that nations and individuals will have to pass through this troubled and dangerous sphere, in their way to the loftier and purer regions of perfect understanding.⁵⁴

This identification of political reform with individual moral and aesthetic development will become a signal characteristic of bourgeois cultural criticism in the early nineteenth century, most clearly developed in Carlyle's essays for the *Edinburgh Review* in the late 1820s. Jeffrey's description also helps explain the socially differentiated nature of the *Edinburgh Review*'s cultural project: championing an essentially functionalist education for the working classes through Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, whilst stressing a more privileged interior aesthetic development—what Jeffrey calls those 'departments of learning which refer chiefly to the heart and the understanding'—as the goal of bourgeois literary criticism.⁵⁵ Of course, this process of cultural development requires the mediation that only the liberal public sphere can provide: 'It is quite true... that the power of public opinion, which is the only sure and ultimate guardian either of freedom or of virtue, is greater or less exactly as the public is more or less enlightened; and that this public never can be trained to the habit of just and commanding sentiments except under the

influence of a sound and progressive literature.’⁵⁶ For Jeffrey, it is the upper classes that exemplify the moral duplicity and craven opportunism of contemporary commercial society, and the enlightened middle-classes that must intervene to rescue the project of capitalist modernity: ‘The abuse of power, and the abuse of the means of enjoyment, are the great sources of misery and depravity in an advanced stage of society. Both originate with those who stand in the highest stages of human fortune; and the cure is to be found, in both cases, only in the enlightened opinion of those who stand a little lower.’⁵⁷

Jeffrey goes on to outline his major critique of de Staël’s work in a manner that reinforces the potentially redemptive moral authority to be found in the cultural discourse of the liberal public sphere. Recalling the social advancements that have been achieved through the moral influence of such major figures in European literature as Shakespeare, Bacon, Locke, Moliere, Hume, Smith and Voltaire, Jeffrey re-states de Staël’s contention that ‘sentiments of justice and humanity have been universally cultivated, and public opinion been armed with a power which renders every other both safe and salutary’.⁵⁸ However, he takes issue with de Staël’s assumption that this ‘March of Intellect’ will inexorably continue, lifting all to the cultural level achieved by a privileged minority of the European elite. While acknowledging the continuing advancement of socially beneficial technologies like printing and other forms of ‘useful knowledge’, Jeffrey sounds a pessimistic note where issues of moral advancement are concerned: ‘But with regard... to every thing touching morality and enjoyment, we really are not sanguine enough to reckon on any considerable improvement; and suspect that men will go on blundering in speculation, and transgressing in practice, pretty nearly as they do at present, to the latest period of their history.’⁵⁹ This cautionary point foreshadows the cultural pessimism exhibited in Carlyle’s ‘Signs of the Times’, while also serving to rationalize the quietism reflected in the moderate Whig strategy of political reform. For Jeffrey, it is the very multiplicity of freedoms that commercial society offers the emancipated individual that also tends to induce a paralyzing sense of moral disquiet.

Perhaps more disturbing to the advocates of perfectibility, Jeffrey suggests that the advances of industrial society create personal freedoms that *by their vary nature* tend to induce profound feelings of unhappiness. He writes:

It is a fact indeed rather perplexing and humiliating to the advocates of perfectibility, that as soon as a man is delivered from the necessity of subsisting himself, and providing for his family, he generally falls into a state of considerable unhappiness; and, if some fortunate anxiety, or necessity for exertion, does not come to his relief, is generally obliged to seek for a slight and precarious distraction in vicious and unsatisfactory pursuits.⁶⁰

Here we have articulated what would become a perennial theme of bourgeois cultural criticism throughout the nineteenth century; echoed in Carlyle's critique of 'Mechanism' in 'Signs of the Times'; in Mill's doctrine of the higher pleasures from *On Liberty*; and in Arnold's urge for the institutional preservation of the 'best that had been thought or written' from *Culture and Anarchy*.⁶¹ The new cultural situation, as Jeffrey sees it, requires an intellectual strategy that emphasizes the quality and refinement of morally beneficial knowledge for a narrow elite: "The real and radical difficulty is to find some pursuit that will permanently interest, --some object that will continue to captivate and engross the faculties: and this, instead of becoming easier in proportion as our intelligence increases, obviously becomes more difficult."⁶² His position here is heavily influenced by the Scottish aesthetician Archibald Alison's 'associationist' ideas about the function and meaning of art in modern society.⁶³ Indeed, Jeffrey based his critique of the growing chasm between elite and popular taste largely on Alison's discussion of this in his 1790 treatise *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*. In this nascent critique of utilitarian modes of thinking inherited from his Scottish Enlightenment predecessors, we can see a profound shifting of the post-Enlightenment cultural project. The priorities of the new project of bourgeois cultural criticism will privilege personal aesthetic cultivation over collective social improvement, interior moral development over external political engagement, and private intellectual virtue over public material well-being.

Jeffrey's moral pessimism in this review is based on his firm belief that 'the age of original genius and of comprehensive and independent reasoning, seems to be over'.⁶⁴ The redemptive intellectual project, he suggests, must now be oriented towards works of critical synthesis and the regulation of cultural consumption for the wider bourgeois public. The essential defensiveness contained in this act of bourgeois cultural consolidation is plain to see: 'But as to any great enlargement of the understanding, or more prevailing vigour of judgment, we will own, that the tendency seems to be all the other way... we suspect, that the vast and enduring products of the virgin soil can no longer be reared in that factitious mould to which cultivation has since given existence...'⁶⁵ This cultural predicament would seem to require a revitalized critical subjectivity from which to analyze the more aesthetically noxious developments in industrial society. As we will see in the discussion of 'Signs of the Times' below, Carlyle sought just such a revolutionary intellectual approach in his pioneering synthesis of German Romantic Idealism with Scottish empirical social philosophy. Borrowing from Goethe and Schiller the concept of *Bildung*, Carlyle extended Jeffrey's argument in this essay by suggesting that the quality of 'inner depth' necessary for genuine self-development would be unavailable to the vast majority of men and women in the new capitalist order. This impending cultural crisis was the essential inspiration for the project of bourgeois cultural criticism in the liberal public sphere. After the 'leveling' in human intelligence that Jeffrey suggests has occurred as part of the necessary process of cultural development in capitalist modernity, the new goal for bourgeois public intellectuals should be to cultivate an elite counterpart to what Coleridge called the 'clerisy'—a reading public capable of functioning as a normative guide for the rest of society through its consumption and dissemination of literature, philosophy and art. In this project of 'aesthetic diffusion' Jeffrey was again influenced by earlier discussions of this by his 'mentor' in these issues, Archibald Alison.⁶⁶ Indeed, the phrase 'general diffusion of knowledge' that would echo in the title of the SDUK, comes from Alison himself and refers to a need to re-create an elite audience capable of responding critically to

new developments in art.⁶⁷ It is in Jeffrey's cultural prescriptions for the 'lower orders', however, that we are able to glimpse the flip side to this intellectual project and recognize the socially exclusionary and intrinsically defensive nature of bourgeois cultural criticism.

Jeffrey argues that the general advancement of industrial society has had a perversely negative effect on the moral, material and intellectual condition of what Jeffrey calls the 'lower orders'. What he takes to mean by this socially imprecise and vaguely derogatory term is the class of peasants and labourers just below the prosperous tradesmen and independent artisans rushing to join the expanding middle-classes. Those who, without capital, 'cannot look up to the rank of master manufacturers' and hence look likely 'to grow into a fixed and degraded *caste*, out of which no person can hope to escape, who has once been enrolled among its members'.⁶⁸ The fundamental affinity this definition has with contemporary conservative discourse on the 'underclass' and 'social exclusion' is undeniable, and for similar reasons of ideological expediency.⁶⁹ It will be interesting to see in the next chapter how Cobbett transforms the negative connotations associated with this term into a positive description celebrating the industry, decency and common sense of the popular classes; when, indeed, the 'lower orders' become the 'labouring classes'.

The fate of this class presented Jeffrey's political philosophy with an intractable problem. For a liberal Whig the steady improvement of the main social groupings of commercial society was taken as a point of faith for all subsequent political and constitutional reform. The emerging patterns of degradation that Jeffrey recognizes in the early stages of industrial capitalism presented progressive liberals like himself with a potentially insoluble moral crisis. The increasing social refinement that has accompanied the rise of manufacturing in England, despite reaching a plateau with the intellectual development of the middle-classes, has for the 'lower orders' helped to 'encourage the breeding of an additional population' living in increasing misery whilst also driving down the wages of the labouring classes.⁷⁰ This structural tendency towards social crisis seemingly built into the new capitalist order requires a specific programme of educational

and moral reform for its most volatile elements; one that will facilitate ideological integration into the capitalist system without encouraging the kind of intellectual pretensions of perfectibility he sees as burdening bourgeois cultural projects.

Recognizing this social dilemma produced by industrial capitalism, Jeffrey outlines a strategy for the ideological integration of the 'lower orders' that would eventually culminate in the founding of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) some ten years later. Although finally carried forward by the *Edinburgh Review*'s most ambitious social reformer, Henry Brougham, Jeffrey provides in this essay the basic lineaments of the SDUK's social purpose, and in the process helps us to uncover the reactionary ideological framework from which this superficially progressive educational project developed. Rather than proposing a systemic solution of radical political and economic reform, Jeffrey suggests mass education as a useful cultural pacifier for those at the bottom of the new capitalist order.

By the universal adoption of a good system of education, habits of foresight and self-control, and rigid economy, may in time no doubt be pretty generally introduced, instead of the improvidence and profligacy which too commonly characterize the larger assemblages of our manufacturing population; and if these lead, as they are likely to do, to the general institution of Friendly Societies among the workmen, *a great palliative will have been provided* for the disadvantages of a situation, which must always be considered as one of the least fortunate which Providence has assigned to any of the human race (my emphasis).⁷¹

The use of terms like 'self-control' and 'rigid economy' as the key objectives of this kind of educational project serves as a good indication of its aim at ideological integration. Fearing the independent efforts of social and political reform initiated in the plebeian public sphere through such cultural institutions as the London Corresponding Society, the Hampden Clubs, and the radical press, Jeffrey is hoping that educational initiatives like the SDUK will help regulate, *from above*, the inevitable cultural conflicts generated by industrial capitalism. This was the formal commencement of what Brian Simon has described as the prolonged cultural conflict between competing intellectual publics over fundamentally divergent visions for the future development of British capitalism: 'A battle

of ideas was under way, one on which the future of society, of capitalism itself seemed to depend. Above all it was necessary to control and direct the thoughts and actions of the workers—to win them as allies in the task of establishing a capitalist order.’⁷²

So we have now established the two-pronged ideological strategy of bourgeois cultural criticism in the early nineteenth century. Firstly, it is a discourse that recognizes the need for the creation of an elite cultural subjectivity in the bourgeois public sphere to withstand the ‘leveling’ wrought by the general progress of industrial civilization. Secondly, it suggests mass educational reform as a cultural ‘palliative’ for the inevitable conflict engendered by the same process of industrial capitalism. In the next chapter we will see how these same urgent cultural issues are dealt with in a radically different way in the plebeian public sphere. But now it may be helpful to look at the meaning of the SDUK, both as a cultural institution and instrumental by-product of the early nineteenth-century bourgeois public sphere, before discussing the further development of this project of bourgeois cultural criticism in the essays of Brougham and Carlyle.

The Ideological Origins of the SDUK: Cultural Regulation in the Bourgeois Public Sphere

Perhaps we can better understand the ideological purpose of the SDUK by first recognizing what cultural practices it was intended to counteract. Jeffrey was deeply concerned with the affect on the working-classes of the incendiary writings of William Cobbett and the institutions of radicalism through which his plebeian discourse was mediated. As early as 1807 he recognized Cobbett’s growing influence, and sought to cripple him polemically by pointing out the fundamental inconsistencies of his political thinking, particularly in his recent conversion to anti-government radicalism. In an article devoted to Cobbett’s writings, Jeffrey recognized the role to be played in the evolution of British democracy of the popular, articulate and increasingly restive readership Cobbett had organized around his journal, the *Political Register*. He writes of this new cultural formation in the British public sphere: ‘We are induced to take some notice of this journal, because we are persuaded that

it has more influence with that most important and most independent class of society, which stands just above the lowest, than was ever possessed by any similar publication.’⁷³ This burgeoning plebeian public sphere was a particularly disturbing cultural phenomenon to an editor of the *Edinburgh Review* who also considered himself the leading intellectual spokesman for the new metropolitan Whig elite. As Jon Klancher has commented, Jeffrey and his bourgeois readership ‘feared most the ominous language of class revolt among those artisan and working-class readers who were reading the “mischievous, profligate, insane” radical writers Cobbett, Thomas Wooler, and Richard Carlile.’⁷⁴

Jeffrey took it upon himself in this 1807 article to act as the ‘rational’ and ‘objective’ assessor of the ‘Cobbett phenomenon’ for his middle-class readership. His justification for this intellectual action speaks for itself: ‘It is not, therefore, from any paltry or vindictive motive, but for the purpose of *reducing his authority to its just standard*, that we think necessary.... to make a few remarks on his title to the praise of consistency, and to exhibit some instances of what has certainly appeared to us as the most glaring and outrageous contradiction’ (my emphasis).⁷⁵ Jeffrey was clearly seeking to undermine this compelling and ideologically transformative intellectual voice in the British public sphere. As George Pottinger has noted of this polemical attack, Jeffrey utilized the full range of rhetorical skills learned in the student societies and legal forums of Enlightenment Edinburgh: ‘... Jeffrey saw Cobbett as an opponent in court, and, as an advocate, professionally destroys his case without compunction. It is forensic art, first practiced in the Speculative Society, and sharpened by watching his seniors at Parliament House.’⁷⁶ The article expresses contempt for Cobbett’s ‘irreverent’ and ‘derisive’ critical voice in what amounts to a signal misreading of plebeian critical stylistics. Jeffrey sees in Cobbett’s nascent ‘Old Corruption’ critique of modern parliamentary politics a dangerous intellectual force bent on exposing this ‘legitimation crisis’ in early nineteenth century British capitalism: ‘Under the present system, Mr Cobbett maintains, that our only rational feelings, are contempt and detestation of our rulers, and despair of any relief or

improvement, except by its total subversion; and with this impression, it will easily be understood, that he looks forward to a revolution, not only without sadness, or dismay, but with a kind of vindictive eagerness and delight.’⁷⁷ It was this profoundly subversive popular cultural formation that the leading critics of the *Edinburgh Review* wished to contain, counter, and replace with the instrumental surrogate of the SDUK.

The SDUK represented the strategic ‘popular’ component of the *Edinburgh Review*’s wider cultural project. Although not formally established until 1826, I suggest that the ideological origins of the SDUK project went back nearly twenty years earlier to Jeffrey’s alarmist reactions to the effects of Cobbett’s discourse on an ‘untutored public’. As Brian Simon has noted, the formation of the SDUK was the end result of a generation of unsupervised political and cultural development in the plebeian public sphere that now required urgent ideological regulation:

The object was to exercise a more immediate and direct influence on the working class than could be achieved by the foundation of schools. The economic, technical, and especially the political developments of the last thirty years had led to the growth of an upper stratum of artisans, or mechanics, among the working class; men who were not only avid for scientific knowledge but also politically informed and seeking to extend their knowledge of economics and politics... To give a suitable direction to working-class thinking and action had, therefore, become urgent.⁷⁸

The leading Whig politician Henry Brougham would play a decisive role in this ‘supervision’ of working-class thinking. It is to his writings on popular education for the *Edinburgh Review* that we now turn.

After failing to get a bill passed pledging compulsory state elementary education for the poor in 1820, Brougham became a leading player in the various independent educational efforts for the poor and working classes. His spearheading of the middle-class takeover of the London Mechanics’ Institute is particularly illustrative of the self-serving nature of bourgeois educational reform efforts like the SDUK. Initially an independent working-class outgrowth of Thomas Hodgskin and J.C. Robertson’s *Mechanics’ Magazine*, the agenda and day-to-day planning of the Institute was slowly co-opted by

bourgeois radicals and liberal reformers like Brougham, the Utilitarian Francis Place, and the Glasgow University physics professor and popular educator George Birbeck—who eventually became the Institute’s first President in 1825. The original working-class members formally expressed their hostility to this sequence of events in a resolution, and both Hodgskin and Robertson were ousted as the secretaries at the official formation of the Institute in December 1823.⁷⁹ This episode would prove to be a turning point in the ongoing ideological warfare carried out between the rival middle- and working-class educational projects of the 1820s. Indeed, David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, echoing claims made by Richard Johnson some twenty years earlier, have gone so far as to suggest that the ideological battles carried out over both the nature and meaning of projects like the London Mechanics’ Institute and the SDUK, helped in the establishment of a distinctive working class pattern of cultural critique in the early nineteenth century: ‘... it is possible to trace out a marked pattern of indigenous working-class protest against the work of the Mechanics’ Institutes and of the SDUK, one that is far more coherent, far more thoroughgoing than anything proceeding from the ranks of the middle-class Radicals.’⁸⁰

It may be helpful to first identify Brougham’s positionality in the wider British public sphere at the time of the writing of his articles on popular education for the *Edinburgh Review*. By 1819 he had become one of the leading liberal Whig politicians in London as an M.P. for Winchelsea; a powerful voice for liberal causes in both England and abroad. Brougham declared his opposition to the Six Acts passed that year and was one of the loudest voices of condemnation at the actions of the Manchester yeomanry that resulted in the Peterloo massacre.⁸¹ From his position on the parliamentary education committee he succeeded in drawing attention to the cause of popular education, culminating in his failed bill of 1820. Recognizing that any solution to the political crisis represented by Peterloo would require a profound ideological transformation on the part of both the working-classes and the establishment, Brougham undertook a sustained campaign of intellectual activity around the question of popular education in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*. In

keeping to both the pattern of critical discourse and the method of intellectual praxis established by Jeffrey before him, Brougham's writings remind us of the distinctive manner in which some of the major social crises of industrialism were confronted in the bourgeois public sphere.

The two essays by Brougham for the *Review*, from 1819 and 1824, are useful examples of social criticism functioning as *de-facto* attempts at cultural regulation. The 1819 publication of Brougham's report on the innovative educational developments at the Swiss school of Monsieur de Fellenberg, 'Establishments at Hofwyl', marked the second engagement in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* with the urgent question of popular education.⁸² The political importance that Brougham ascribes to de Fellenberg's pedagogical experiments at Hofwyl—alternatively called the 'School of Industry'—is apparent from the opening of the article. Referring to the Swiss pedagogue's initial inspiration for his educational project in political as much as cultural terms, Brougham writes: 'It appeared to him, that the world was blindly hurrying on to irretrievable ruin; and that a sounder system of education for the great body of the people, could alone stop the progress of error and corruption... he gave up the idea of serving his country as a politician; and... determined to set about the slow work of elementary reformation, by a better mode of education, and to persevere in it for the rest of his life.'⁸³ From this opening we can see the way in which Brougham links 'benign' educational control with political pacification. He clearly views this Swiss model for popular education as a promising means of preventing the social revolution portended in events like Peterloo.

Brougham's report on the school anticipates the instrumental aims he would establish for the SDUK and reveals the wider project of ideological integration driving his intellectual efforts at this time. With a frankness that reflects the powerful sense of ideological complicity between critic and audience, Brougham suggests that projects like the school at Hofwyl more than repay their original costs in the invaluable service they provide to the smooth functioning of industrial and commercial society:

We would observe, however, that the money laid out upon such establishments, even where they do not entirely pay their own expenses, may still be considered as *placed at high interest*, even in a worldly sense of the word; since farmers, proprietors of land, and manufacturers, must find it well worth their while to be at the expense of *raising nurseries of intelligent and faithful servants for their own use*, either directly, by establishing such schools, or indirectly, by allowing a yearly contribution to those who do (second emphasis mine).⁸⁴

Brougham here is recognizing the role early education can play in the larger process of ideological conditioning. He cites the lack of such a controlling influence in the recent development of independent sources of knowledge amongst the working classes as potentially dangerous for society as a whole, and inherently corrupting for the classes in question: 'The fatal consequences of defective and erroneous information, especially among the lower and most numerous classes, and the difficulty of establishing the truth in time to counteract the effects of error, has been sufficiently exemplified in our times; and indiscriminate reading, particularly of common newspapers, may be thought not much better than no reading at all.'⁸⁵ This argument, essentially continuing the one put forward in Jeffrey's attack on Cobbett some twelve years earlier, displays an awareness of the powerful counter-hegemonic potential of the plebeian public sphere, and implies that it is only through a comprehensive primary education focusing on the 'moral development' of the poor and working classes that future social and cultural conflict can be averted. Brougham cites the educational method practiced at Hofwyl as a positive example in this respect: '... upon this principle, it would be difficult to dispute the advantages of that sort of teaching which the school at Hofwyl undertakes to give:--the boys never see a newspaper, and scarcely a book; they are taught, *viva voce*, a few matters of fact, and rules of practical application. The rest of their education consists simply in inculcating habits of industry, frugality, veracity, docility, and mutual kindness...'⁸⁶ By countering the corrosive moral effects of industrial capitalism with a strict disciplinary code, these rules for popular instruction were intended to develop a personality more accepting of industrialism's ruthlessly utilitarian social logic.

When discussing the advantages to be had in the instruction of rural rather than urban labourers, Brougham unwittingly describes the ideological lifeworld that sustained the metropolitan plebeian public sphere in the early nineteenth century. He asserts that the perceived failure of previous efforts at popular learning was the result of the vibrant urban cultural context of instruction ‘where teaching of some sort is within the reach of the common people, together with books and newspaper’.⁸⁷ This lifeworld of popular intellectual discourse, Brougham suggests, would always tend to foster political dissent and to stimulate alternative ideologies. It is a world that ‘is always disposed to be turbulent, dissolute, and rapacious; the facility of communication serves often to propagate falsehood, and almost always to stimulate jealousy and discontent’.⁸⁸ The alarmist connotations conveyed in this description of the popular culture of the working classes, linking ‘moral degeneracy’ with potential social insurrection, would become a constant theme in the writings of educational reformers well into the Victorian period.⁸⁹ That this description closely approximates what Iain McCalman has called the ‘radical underworld’ shows the extent to which the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century was irrevocably split between rival bourgeois and plebeian publics, and how this cultural schism tormented bourgeois reformers like Brougham who wished to eradicate independent sources of popular knowledge and replace them with semi-official and instrumental ones like the SDUK.⁹⁰ As E.P. Thompson observed in *The Making of the English Working Class*, the expansion of the Radical public in the postwar period ‘was recognised by those influential agencies—notably the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge—which made prodigious and lavishly subsidised efforts to divert the readers to more wholesome and improving matter’.⁹¹

Other aspects of the curriculum at Hofwyl also served to reinforce the legitimacy of the new social order produced by industrial capitalism. An encouragement of private industry is suggested not as a prelude to any future prospects of social advancement, but merely to foster in the poorest class the discipline required to ‘being good husbandmen’.⁹²

Brougham assures his readers that the ‘pupils of the *school of industry* are not raised above their station; but their station, dignified and improved, is raised to them’.⁹³ Indeed, he suggests that the structural crisis of overpopulation and permanent social inequality first touched upon by Jeffrey six years earlier, can only be properly addressed through the kind instrumental educational programme seen at Hofwyl: ‘We may devise legislative checks on population, and call to our aid even war and emigration: But the most powerful remedies will prove but palliatives; and nothing will do, after all, but individual prudence and practical morality. Now this is precisely what is meant to be inculcated in the *school of industry*.’⁹⁴ Brougham here is touching upon the most important aspect of this kind of instrumental education for liberal Whig reformers: its emphasis on individual moral reform in place of systemic social and political reformation.

Cultural reforms represented in projects like the School of Industry and, later, in the SDUK, functioned quite clearly as explicit interventions into the developing political consciousness of the working classes. The critics of the *Edinburgh Review* viewed the development of the new mass society of industrialism with a complex mixture of alarm and opportunity. In order to counter the cultural disruption wrought by popular intellectual formations like the plebeian public sphere, bourgeois reformers like Brougham recognized the necessity of regulating the imaginative life of the ‘lower orders’ through educational programmes which they could carefully guide and manage. For Brougham this form of popular education was to be the specific vehicle for the moral transformation of the working classes, and in a particularly revealing digression, he explicitly links the inevitability of this ideological project to the general sense of modernity represented by the liberal public sphere itself: ‘Useful knowledge, practical experience, virtuous principles, are no longer deposited exclusively in a few heads which may be struck off, or consigned to a few leaves of papyrus which may be lost or consumed; but are spread among countless numbers of men and of printed books, beyond the power of any revolution short of an universal deluge to destroy.’⁹⁵

What Brougham's careful review of the 'little world' of 'different ranks and professions' in the ideological nursery at Hofwyl finally represents is the bourgeois intellectual elite's attempt at moral control during a period of intense cultural change and social ferment. Richard Johnson has perhaps best summarized the true meaning of this desire for social control in his study of early Victorian educational policy: '...the early Victorian obsession with the education of the poor is best understood as a concern about authority, about power, about the assertion (or the re-assertion) of control. This concern was expressed in an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behavior of the working class.'⁹⁶ This ambitious project of cultural regulation in the bourgeois public sphere of the early nineteenth century would reach its apogee with the founding of the SDUK in 1826.

Brougham's next major article in the *Edinburgh Review* dealing with popular education, 'The Best Means of Promoting Knowledge Amongst The Working Classes', published in October 1824, is more directly relevant to an examination of the ideological purpose of the SDUK. As he observed in the opening of the 1824 essay, the discourse on popular education in the *Edinburgh Review* had steadily advanced from elementary to adult education, and from pedagogical theory to 'scientific application':

The subject of Popular Education has frequently engaged our attentions since the commencement of this Journal; but we have hitherto confined ourselves to the great fundamental branch of the question,-- the provisions for elementary instruction by schools in which the poor may be taught reading and writing, and thus furnished with the means of acquiring knowledge. We are desirous now of pursuing this inquiry into its other branch -- the application of those means -- the use of those instruments -- the manner in which the working classes of the community may be most effectually and safely assisted in improving their minds by scientific application.⁹⁷

I would suggest that this transition in the focus of the *Edinburgh Review*'s signal cultural project of educational reform reflected some of the growing external pressures on the bourgeois public sphere in the mid-1820s. The growth of an increasingly independent and vocal popular movement for political reform in the postwar period had become a chief concern for leading Whig reformers like Brougham. Having made some headway in the

campaign for the expansion of 'the direct operation of knowledge' amongst the younger part of the population, Brougham argues that the urgent task now is to develop the 'useful education' of the adult population of the working classes.⁹⁸ In a rather striking irony, considering his role in the middle-class takeover of the Mechanics' Institute during the period of the writing of this article (see above), Brougham asserts that the independent actions of the working classes on behalf of their own education must remain the bedrock of any reform efforts: 'It is manifest that the people themselves must be the great agents in accomplishing the work of their own education.'⁹⁹ However, he adds a little later that 'although the people must be the source and the instruments of their own improvement, they may be essentially aided in their efforts to instruct themselves'.¹⁰⁰ So here we have laid out in a pair of contradictory statements the essence of the ideology of Whig educational reform soon to be embodied in the SDUK. It was to be an 'independent' popular education guided by a middle-class intellectual elite.

Ironically, as part of this project of 'popular knowledge' Brougham proposes a list of measures that had already been taken up in a more vigorous form by Cobbett and the other leading critics in the unstamped press. Brougham suggests that a principal method 'for promoting knowledge among the poor, is the encouragement of cheap publications..¹⁰¹ A useful target, he relates, would be a weekly publication priced at two pence.¹⁰² Cobbett had pioneered the publication of the two-penny periodical some eight years earlier with his two-pence supplement to the *Political Register*, the so-called 'Two-Penny Trash'. In another striking parallel to events already taking place in the plebeian public sphere, Brougham recommends (with surprisingly radical implications) the structure of discourse that should be encouraged in this new popular press: 'Why then may not every topic of politics, party as well as general, be treated of in these cheap publications? It is highly useful to the community that the true principles of the constitution should be understood by every man who lives under it. The peace of the country, and the stability of the government, could not be more effectually secured than by the universal diffusion of

this kind of knowledge.’¹⁰³ In this last confident prediction by Brougham we can clearly see the contrast between the political effects anticipated by a popular cultural praxis conceived in the bourgeois public sphere from that developed in its radical plebeian counterpart. In the former it was hoped the spread of political knowledge would lead to a kind of peaceful constitutional equilibrium in the evolving institutions of British democracy, in the latter the aim of popular intellectual emancipation was a radical political reform based on unified opposition to the dominant institutions of British liberal capitalism.

Brougham puts forth four recommendations for how this new system of popular public instruction can be achieved. Firstly, he suggests that the ‘mechanics’ of instruction in these popular societies can be integrated into the rhythms of the working environment where, on a shift basis, ‘one may always read while the others are employed’.¹⁰⁴ He suggests this work-based strategy of instruction for reasons of simple economic pragmatism; it would, as he puts it, ‘save money as well as time’.¹⁰⁵ His second recommendation emphasizes the benefits of conversation as a ‘useful adjunct to any private or other education received by the working classes’.¹⁰⁶ As industrial settings may impede such activities, he suggests evening meetings as useful supplements for this kind of sociable instruction. The proposed structure of these meetings resembles a slightly more democratic version of some of the bourgeois intellectual societies of Brougham’s student days in Edinburgh. He writes: ‘The tone ought to be given from the beginning, in ridicule of speech making, both as to length and wordiness. A subject of discussion may be given out at one meeting for the next; or the chairman may read a portion of some work, allowing each member to stop him at any moment, for the purpose of contraverting, supporting, or illustrating by his remarks the passage just read.’¹⁰⁷ Crucially, Brougham insists that the place of these meetings be restricted and ‘should on no account be the alehouse’ — the most popular contemporary location for gatherings in the plebeian public sphere. The regulation of popular discourse could be further ensured, he suggests, by careful supervision on the part of the proprietor of the particular location for instruction: ‘Whoever lent his premises

for this purpose might satisfy himself that no improper persons should be admitted, by taking the names of the whole club from two or three steady men, who could be answerable for the demeanour of the rest.’¹⁰⁸ As Brougham well knows from his previous experience as a lawyer for Radical activists, such a precaution would effectively function to reduce these meetings to apolitical gatherings where serious discussion of contemporary political issues would be marginalized in favour of scientific lessons and general instruction in ‘moral betterment’.

This leads to his third recommendation about the ‘curriculum’ of these popular educational societies. Brougham points to the necessity of compression in the lessons for workers and suggests that they ‘should be prepared adapted [sic] to their circumstances’.¹⁰⁹ This would necessitate the creation of a library of works prepared by the organizers of the SDUK for the instruction of workers. Perhaps not incidentally, this would also provide an opportunity to instill ‘value-neutral’ knowledge in the minds of the working classes in the name of practical expediency. The promotion of scientific knowledge was chief among the pedagogical goals of this kind of instruction. As Brougham rhapsodizes on the intrinsic value of scientific disciplines like mathematics and natural philosophy for the working classes, we can see the investment made by leading bourgeois ideologists in the transmission of epistemologies which they thought would encourage the perpetuation of industrial capitalism:

Hence, a most essential service will be rendered to the cause of knowledge by him who shall devote his time to the composition of elementary treatises on the mathematics, sufficiently clear, and yet sufficiently compendious, to exemplify the method of reasoning employed in that science, and to impart an accurate knowledge of the most fundamental and useful propositions, with their application to practical purposes, and treatises upon natural philosophy, which may teach the great principles of physics, and their practical application, to readers who have but a general knowledge of mathematics, or who are wholly ignorant of the science beyond the common rules of arithmetic.¹¹⁰

Here is a pristine example of the kind of educational content ridiculed by Cobbett as ‘Scotch Feelosophy’. What this useful polemical phrase perhaps underestimates is the

sincerity with which bourgeois intellectual reformers like Brougham approached the cause of popular scientific education. Indeed, the effort to both understand and popularly transmit these scientific-conceptual foundations of industrial society, also evinced in the lessons of political economy, can be viewed as the logical successor to the high Scottish Enlightenment discourse of the 'science of man'. What the vigilant student of intellectual practices in the period must also be aware of, however, is the way in which this new effort at scientific popularization also functioned to ideologically 'anchor' its worker-students to the system of liberal industrial capitalism. For Brougham it is clear that the actual processes of a popular scientific education could encourage a kind of speculative appreciation of the workings of industrial capitalism: 'Indeed, those discoveries immediately connected with experiment and observation are most likely to be made by men, whose lives, being spent in the midst of mechanical operations, are at the same time instructed in the general principles upon which these depend, and trained betimes to habits of speculation.'¹¹¹ Here we have a concise summary of the pedagogical philosophy of the SDUK that runs directly counter to radical notions of 'really useful knowledge'. This politically radical conception of knowledge worked against the instrumentalism implicit in the popular utilitarian lessons promoted by the SDUK and sought to both highlight and liberate the student from capitalist abstractions. As Richard Johnson has explained: 'It was a way of distancing working-class aims from some immediate (capitalist) conception of utility... It expressed the conviction that real knowledge served practical ends, ends, that is, for the knower.'¹¹²

Brougham's fourth recommendation on the organization of popular education emphasizes the value of lectures for the workers. He suggests that these physical sites of instruction are valuable for the clarification they can provide to the often untutored reading of the workers: '... the effects of public lectures are great indeed... the students are enabled to read with advantage; things are explained to them which no books sufficiently illustrate; access is afforded to teachers who can remove the difficulties which occur perpetually in

the reading of uneducated persons...'¹¹³ Of course, the contrast of this kind of hierarchical instruction to the pedagogical environment fostered in some of the cultural institutions of the plebeian public sphere is profound. Where the role of the lecturer in the SDUK was to supervise learning and clarify concepts based on objective and empirical truths, the collaborative learning encouraged by the provisional structure of Radical organizations like the Hampden Clubs sought to foster emancipatory political consciousness as much as systematic methods of thinking. As Richard Johnson suggests, radical educational practice worked against both the mystification and the implied culture of expertise that often accompanied bourgeois institutional settings like the SDUK lecture: 'There is a determination to work through the problems politically, to make the "intellectuals" work for us... Radicals... argued that their conception of knowledge was wide, much more liberal than philanthropic offerings.'¹¹⁴ At the conclusion of the article Brougham reinforces the formative role to be played by the intellectual bourgeoisie in the establishment and running of the central institutions of the SDUK. He writes: 'The time when information and advice is most wanted, with other assistance from the wealthy and the well informed, is at the beginning of the undertaking; and at that time the influence of those patrons will necessarily be the most powerful.'¹¹⁵ When we consider that these concluding words function as an appeal to the wider readership of the leading journal in the bourgeois public sphere to help in the effort to supervise the forms and practices of popular education, the ideological nature of this form of cultural regulation becomes a little clearer. In the end, the principal intention that lay behind bourgeois efforts at popular education like the SDUK was to foster a more compliant institutional alternative to the praxis-driven model of education then developing in the plebeian public sphere.

Carlyle's Private Social Text: Romantic Cultural Critique in the Bourgeois Public Sphere

In June 1827 Brougham published an article in the *Edinburgh Review* marking the efforts of the newly established SDUK to develop a functional library for the instruction of the

working classes.¹¹⁶ In that same issue of the journal another aspect of the cultural project of the bourgeois public sphere was being launched. With Thomas Carlyle's main contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* in the late 1820s we move from the active construction of institutions of public virtue, to the private contemplation of the corrosive effects of industrialism on individual moral development. Francis Jeffrey's stated aim to 'Germanize the British public' through his young discovery had the unintended result of creating a revolutionary new critical discourse in the journal, made up, as it were, of the peculiar mixture of German Romantic Idealism and Scottish Common Sense philosophy.

Responding to Jeffrey's encouragement, Carlyle published his first essay in the *Edinburgh Review* on German Romantic literature in June 1827.¹¹⁷ This short essay on the German critic Richter was important in that it not only sought to introduce a foreign intellectual tradition to a skeptical British public, but it also helped to lay the groundwork for a new form of intellectual practice in the liberal public sphere of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh. The literary critic Gregory Maertz has claimed that the then obscure young Scottish intellectual's ambitious search for a new epistemological foundation became one of the defining acts of cultural translation in the wider British public sphere during the Romantic period. The general thrust of his interpretation of this turning point in British intellectual history is accurate, even if it ignores Carlyle's equally formative negotiation of the post-Scottish Enlightenment philosophical tradition during this period:

There is some irony in the process by which Carlyle, as a consummate outsider in London, acquired his enormous cultural capital; sensing that the aspirations of the British public for cultural authority could not be met by domestic high culture, he offered, in a series of articles and translations that appeared in the established journals of the day, chief among them Francis Jeffrey's *Edinburgh Review*, a highly idiosyncratic interpretation of German culture and its leading representative, the polymath phenomenon Goethe, who had not his equal in contemporary Britain... 'Witnessing' for Goethe as a cultural messiah becomes the thrust of the aesthetic mission disclosed in the essays and translations published between 1824-1832.¹¹⁸

Although Maertz perhaps overpersonalizes Carlyle's assimilation of German Idealist thought through the figure of Goethe, it cannot be denied that this eccentric intellectual

product of the Scottish Enlightenment was earnestly searching for a new cultural paradigm from which to morally engage with the social changes brought by industrial capitalism. Now comfortably ensconced in bourgeois Comely Bank, Carlyle would pursue this project of cultural mediation with the dedication of a new religious convert, and in the process highlight a new aspect of bourgeois intellectual subjectivity during a period of increasing social anxiety amongst the British middle-class elite. This critical project began in earnest with the publication of his major review essay, 'State of German Literature', in the October 1827 issue of the *Edinburgh Review*.¹¹⁹

Referred to in a contemporary letter by Carlyle as his *Opus Majus*, the publication of the 'State of German Literature' crowned the efforts of the leading British intellectual journal to 'domesticate' philosophical developments in Germany for its wide and influential readership in the English speaking world.¹²⁰ The most important feature of this seminal article, at least from the perspective of this study of intellectual formations in the British public sphere, is not its lucid overview of German writing of the Romantic period, but the way in which it rehearses the meditative tone and idealist subjectivity of 'Signs of the Times', published two years later in 1829. Indeed, Carlyle's assimilation of Kantian aesthetics in the review essay marked a turning point in the development of bourgeois cultural criticism in Britain. As C.F. Harrold noted in his landmark study *Carlyle and German Thought* (1934), the period before the publication of 'State of German Literature' witnessed a clear and gradual transformation of Carlyle's intellectual subjectivity, moving away from the epistemological foundations of British materialist philosophy and towards a more spiritually appealing form of Romantic Idealism: 'What the new prophets were uttering on the nature of the universe was of capital importance to Carlyle when he settled in Comely Bank in 1826. He noted that they were reaffirming the old world of spirit, and that to them matter had ceased to have its ancient grip of "iron necessity".'¹²¹ Carlyle's synthesis of the chief ideas from these 'new prophets' on the nature of material reality in

industrial society would provide the foundation for a new practice of Romantic social criticism in the British public sphere.

The review of Franz Horn's studies of German writing that served as the basis for the 1827 article was an ideal vehicle for Carlyle to introduce this 'strange literature' to a readership more familiar to the comforting certainties of British empirical thought.¹²² In the best tradition of Scottish Enlightenment historicism, he begins this introduction of German literature by noting how the material advances of bourgeois societies in Europe have enabled a corresponding cultural development in the growing cosmopolitanism of the liberal public sphere of ideas: '... the commerce in material things has paved roads for commerce in things spiritual, and a true thought, or a noble creation, passes lightly to us from the remotest of countries, provided only our minds be opened to receive it'.¹²³ This appreciation of the cultural development produced by capitalist modernity in Europe shows Carlyle to be in the mainstream of liberal bourgeois thought of the time. In this sense his intellectual efforts here can be said to be truly synthetic; using the new moral theories of German Idealism to supplement, rather than overturn, the general structures of liberal capitalist society. He continues a little later in this same vein, arguing that commerce and culture both can and must move in concert with each other: '... yet surely if the grand principle of free intercourse is so profitable in material commerce, much more must it be in the commerce of the mind, the products of which are thereby not so much transported out of one country into another, as multiplied over all, for the benefit of all, and without loss to any'.¹²⁴ This normative ideal of a universal civil society emerging out of the development of Europe's cultural modernity is a concept more familiar to the German Enlightenment than its more materialistic Scottish cousin, and is most clearly illustrated in the thought of Kant.¹²⁵ What is interesting here, however, is how Carlyle seems to view this cultural process—what I am calling for the purposes of this study the project of bourgeois cultural criticism—as occurring unproblematically within the parameters of liberal capitalist society, arguing in fact, that one must be the natural outgrowth of the other.

It is in Carlyle's explication of German Romantic aesthetics that we first encounter this new idealist conception of intellectual subjectivity. Defending Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (translated by Carlyle in 1824) and *Faust*, Carlyle argues that British readers have failed to display the imaginative sympathy necessary to appreciate these new literary works: 'We have heard few English criticisms of such works, in which the first condition of an approach to accuracy was complied with; —a transposition of the critic into the author's point of vision, a survey of the author's means and objects as they lay before himself, and a just trial of these by rules of universal application.'¹²⁶ In explaining the moral power and critical functions of Romantic taste, Carlyle provides a basic outline of the ontological aspects of idealist cultural practice: 'Taste... must mean a general susceptibility to truth and nobleness; a sense to discern, and a heart to love and reverence, all beauty, order, goodness, wheresoever or in whatsoever forms and accompaniments they are to be seen.'¹²⁷ For Carlyle, this exalted state of inner-being is a universal that transcends all external hierarchies, social ranks, and physical barriers: 'This surely implies, as its chief condition, not any given external rank or situation, but a finely gifted mind, purified into harmony with itself, into keenness and justness of vision; above all, kindled into love and generous admiration.'¹²⁸ This idealist subjectivity claims its social progressivity through a studied disavowal of material social reality. Anticipating the Arnoldian conception of 'Culture' from *Culture and Anarchy* by some forty years¹²⁹, Carlyle writes: 'Is culture of this sort found exclusively among the higher ranks? We believe it proceeds *less from without than within*, in every rank. The charms of Nature, the majesty of Man, the infinite loveliness of Truth and Virtue, are not hidden from the eye of the poor; but from the eye of the vain, the corrupted and self-seeking, be he poor or rich' (my emphasis).¹³⁰ Carlyle is proposing the German Romantic concept of *Bildung*—or self-cultivation—as a morally attractive surrogate for political or material transformation. As Maertz has observed, 'Carlyle believes that radical self-transformation of Bildung... must precede any reorganization of society'.¹³¹ This conception of culture denies its own material existence

in an earnest appeal for moral transcendence, but the very nature and method of its communication in the leading bourgeois intellectual journal of the day presents a more clearly delineated ideological agenda. Carlyle's 'revolutionary' notion of self-cultivation assumes his audience will have the time, material resources and aesthetic education to develop themselves in this exalted manner.

In Carlyle's assimilation of German idealist practice here we gain an insight into the ideological origins of British Romantic cultural criticism. After introducing this new conception of cultural praxis, he outlines the terms and conditions for its wider transmission in the public sphere. The heroic carriers of this cultural salvation are to be 'men who, from amid the perplexed and conflicting elements of their every-day existence, are to form themselves into harmony and wisdom, and shew forth the same wisdom to others that exist along with them'.¹³² This is what David Lloyd and Paul Thomas have described as the 'dominant paradigm of the well-formed subject'. They define this subjectivity as a uniquely bourgeois expression of cultural politics in the nineteenth century that culminated in the Arnoldian idea of the ethical state: 'The principal characteristics of that subject are, again, that it should develop over time and through cultivation; that it should seek wholeness or harmony of its faculties against the narrowing effects of specialization and class perspectives; that its highest expression lies in judgment or critical spectatorship rather than in the unbalancing absorption of political activism; and that it should find in the state its natural representative.'¹³³ It follows then, that this subject need not be concerned with the political and material causes of unhappiness, but only with the attainment of an aesthetically pure inner harmony. I am interested in the way Carlyle's descriptions of idealist intellectual practice in this article also suggest a definite relationship between the cultural critic and his readers in the wider bourgeois public sphere. The audience for this discourse on culture, like Carlyle's new intellectual figure, is deliberately abstracted from any material or social context. From the quiet repose of the study, the ideal

consumer of this new cultural criticism is free to transpose a private notion of ‘moral harmony’ onto the social contradictions created by industrial capitalism.

Later in the article Carlyle suggests the specific ways in which German critical practice is an advance on its British equivalent. The task of the critic needs to be enlarged in a way that both builds upon and transcends that of orthodox literary critical practice.

Carlyle writes:

The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences, and struck out similitudes; but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organised his dramas, and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality?... What is this unity of theirs; and can our deeper inspection discern it to be indivisible, and existing by necessity, because each work springs, as it were, from the general elements of all Thought, and grows up therefrom, into form and expansion by its own growth? Not only who was the poet, and how did he compose; but what and how was the poem, and why was it a poem and not rhymed eloquence, creation and not figured passion? These are the questions for the critic.¹³⁴

Carlyle is calling for a criticism of moral value as well as aesthetic appreciation; a practice that attempts to configure the underlying structure of the creative spirit itself rather than merely its outward patterns and forms. This is a criticism explicitly by and for a privileged intellectual elite concerned with personal cultivation and individual, rather than social, transformation. As Lloyd and Thomas have suggested of Romantic poetry, this new critical practice ‘provides a kind of training in ethical development through cultural pedagogy’ in which a new ‘mode of subjectivity’ is created, one that is conducive to the new ideological functions of bourgeois citizenship in the liberal public sphere.¹³⁵ Carlyle emphasizes the spiritual nature of this form of criticism: ‘She pretends to open for us this deeper import; to clear our sense that it may discern the pure brightness of this eternal Beauty, and recognise it as heavenly, under all forms where it looks forth, and reject, as of the earth earthy, all forms, be their material splendour what it may, where no gleaming of that other shines through.’¹³⁶ For Carlyle, this transition from the material to the spiritual evinced in German writing is clearly an advancement on the empirical standards of British criticism.

Building upon Fichte's notion of the 'Divine Idea', Carlyle develops a theory of elite intellectual practice which both echoes Coleridge's 'clerisy' and anticipates Arnold's 'alienated' men of culture. For Carlyle, a self-appointed intellectual elite in the liberal public sphere is best placed to operate as the transmitter of this hidden 'Divine Idea': 'Literary Men are the appointed interpreters of this Divine Idea; a perpetual priesthood, we might say, standing forth, generation after generation, as the dispensers and living types of God's everlasting wisdom, to shew it in their writings and actions, in such particular form as their own particular times require.'¹³⁷ The ideological function of the modern bourgeois cultural critic emerges in this assimilation of German Idealist intellectual practice. Carlyle is conceiving here a form of cultural pedagogy which 'reproduces the social hierarchy' in the form of the critic, whose role as the 'master-teacher' 'always reestablishes him as a being of superior ethical development'.¹³⁸ It is the reader in the wider bourgeois public sphere whose 'malformed' subjectivity must in the end be completed by the intellectual 'actions' of the cultural critic.

Defending the German Idealists from the epithet of 'mysticism', Carlyle ends his article with a flattering appraisal of that great systematizer of Idealist philosophy, Immanuel Kant. Carlyle suggests that it is from this 'quiet, vigilant, clear sighted man' that British philosophy has much to learn.¹³⁹ Perhaps a little disingenuously, he argues that the main difference between the British and German intellectual traditions is not based on issues of philosophical substance, but rather of literary style: 'The truth is, German philosophy differs not more widely from ours in the substance of its doctrines, than in its manner of communicating them.'¹⁴⁰ I argue that Carlyle here was attempting to establish a common intellectual space between the Scottish empirical tradition embodied by Dugald Stewart and the German Idealism of Kant.¹⁴¹ Carlyle sees the elevated place that the discipline of philosophy occupies in German intellectual life as analogous to its counterpart of cultural criticism in the British public sphere, claiming that it is 'the living principle and soul of all Sciences' whose 'doctrines should be present with every cultivated writer'.¹⁴² Kant's

contribution to this rich intellectual tradition is highlighted: 'The noble system of morality, the purer theology, the lofty views of man's nature derived from it... have told with remarkable and beneficial influence on the whole spiritual character of Germany.'¹⁴³

This introduction of Kantian Idealism serves to prepare the reader for his privileging of idealist over materialist epistemology in the conclusion. Revising the liberal empirical tradition of British philosophy, Carlyle writes that metaphysical speculation must now proceed on the basis of a Kantian conception of the world, where true social knowledge becomes an extension of man's interior life: 'The Kantist, in direct contradiction to Locke and all his followers, both of the French, and English or Scotch school, commences from within, and proceeds outwards; instead of commencing from without, and, with various precautions and hesitations, endeavouring to proceed inwards.'¹⁴⁴ I would argue that this conversion by Carlyle to a Kantian social aesthetics represents a fundamental shift in the trajectory of British bourgeois thought in the early nineteenth century. It would lead to a new practice of Romantic cultural criticism where the aim of individual 'inner perfection' would replace that of social transformation. Social truth would no longer be sought 'historically and by experiment' as in the general pattern of Scottish Enlightenment social philosophy, but through 'intuition, in the deepest and purest nature of Man'.¹⁴⁵ This idea taken from German philosophical speculation, Carlyle argues, compels the critic to a new search for personal transcendence, or what he calls the 'Primitive Truth'. He writes: 'Truth is to be loved purely and solely because it is true. With moral, political, religious considerations, high and dear they may otherwise be, the Philosopher, as such, has no concern.'¹⁴⁶

Using Herbert Marcuse's liberal-reactionary paradigm of German Romanticism as a guide, Gregory Maertz concludes that 'Carlyle clearly belongs to the category of "reactionary Romantic"'.¹⁴⁷ This form of reactionary Romanticism, Maertz suggests, encourages an effacement of all potential strategies of political reform to the point where 'the promise of escape from the present is the catalytic element in the romantic

imagination'.¹⁴⁸ The British critic grappling with the political, economic and social realities of industrial modernity now had an 'advanced' and compelling philosophical example from Germany to lead him out of the moral cul-de-sac that empiricism had created. Carlyle ends the essay with a lyrical description of this new idealist intellectual subjectivity that nicely mirrors the radical transformation of space and time promised to the reader of this new discourse of cultural criticism:

In any point of Space, in any section of Time, let there be a living Man; and there is an Infinitude above him and beneath him, and an Eternity encompasses him on this hand and on that; and tones of Sphere-music, and tidings from loftier worlds, will flit round him, if he can but listen, and visit him with holy influences, even in the thickest press of trivialities, or the din of busiest life.¹⁴⁹

This brief passage, with its meditative tone and powerful evocation of the Romantic self in engagement with the chaotic material reality of industrial society, suggests a fundamental transformation in intellectual subjectivity that Carlyle would complete two years later with 'Signs of the Times'. Jon Klancher has argued that the new 'social text' of industrialism consumed by middle-class readers in the 1820s was part of a larger process of cultural transformation in the bourgeois public sphere. That middle-class audience's increasingly mediated relationship with social reality through the cultural mechanism of the public sphere would eventually culminate in the semiotic disorder reflected in works of criticism like 'Signs of the Times': 'As the language of intellectual desire gestures towards the fullness of meaning, it also pushes meaning into a realm that cannot be captured in a sign. This positive hermeneutic, however, must be balanced for middle-class readers by an opposing, negative hermeneutic that plunges the audience into a welter of signs.'¹⁵⁰ Carlyle's exploration of industrialism as a chaos of competing signs would typify this new form of mediated and individuated cultural praxis in the British public sphere.

The essay that was published in the June 1829 issue of the *Edinburgh Review* was written by Carlyle in the spring of that year. The place of its composition was not the bourgeois comfort of Comley Bank, Edinburgh but the rural isolation of Craigenputtoch,

Dumfriesshire. It is perhaps an illuminating irony that this seminal meditation on the cultural crisis of industrial modernity was actually written from a dilapidated farmhouse in the Southwest of Scotland. In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams described Carlyle's essay as the first authentic articulation of bourgeois anxiety at the then diffusely perceived cultural phenomenon of industrialism: 'Carlyle is in this essay stating a direct response to the England of his times: to Industrialism, which he was the first to name: to the feel, the quality, of men's general reactions—that structure of contemporary feeling which is only ever apprehended directly...'¹⁵¹ That such a landmark in prescient, even prophetic, social observation could be created in the isolated repose of Craigenputtoch reminds us of the profound transformation of intellectual subjectivity which 'Signs of the Times' represented.

What first set the essay apart from nearly all previous criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* was the manner in which Carlyle completely dispensed with the formal structure of the review article. Although there were a series of texts under review, Carlyle shifts his critical focus to society at large, what Jon Klancher has called the 'social text'.¹⁵² The experimental structure of 'Signs of the Times' was intended to liberate the author from direct textual exegesis, allowing him to explore in both a more general and more personal sense the nature of human experience in industrial society. Indeed, Carlyle hints in the opening of the essay that the contemporary feeling of moral paralysis in modern society—the intense cultural self-consciousness that has accompanied the present stage of history—is in part an intellectual phenomenon produced by the profusion of discourses in the public sphere in the 1820s: 'The Fifth-monarchy men prophesy from the Bible, and the Utilitarians from Bentham. The one announces that the last of the seals is to be opened, positively, in the year 1860; and the other assures us, that "the greatest-happiness principle" is to make a heaven of earth, in still a shorter time.'¹⁵³ The social crisis of industrialism is defined here as a crisis of discourse in which Carlyle assumes a direct relationship between intellectual interaction and social ontology. He writes that 'there is still a real magic in the action and reaction of minds on one another. The casual delirium

of a few becomes, by this mysterious reverberation, the frenzy of many; men lose the use, not only of their understandings, but of their bodily senses; while the most obdurate unbelieving hearts melt, like the rest, in the furnace where all are cast as victims and as fuel.’¹⁵⁴ In this brief opening we can see how Carlyle’s critical idealism will function in the meditation, conceiving as it does a direct correlation between social reality and private intellectual anxiety. This relationship will function throughout the essay as its defining dialectic, whether expressed in a Mechanical/Spiritual or a public/private opposition that can only be reconciled individually, within the confines of a transformed cultural subjectivity.

In the opening of the essay Carlyle also reveals his dissatisfaction with the Scottish Enlightenment intellectual tradition he has inherited. Intellectual sympathy, that staple concept of Scottish moral philosophy since the lectures of Francis Hutcheson in the 1730s, has for him become an instrumental part of the distorted subjectivity associated with modern industrial society: ‘It is grievous to think, that this noble omnipotence of Sympathy has been so rarely the Aron’s-rod of Truth and Virtue, and so often the Enchanter’s-rod of Wickedness and Folly!’¹⁵⁵ In this opening lament Carlyle sets out the task for a new project of cultural criticism in the bourgeois public sphere. It will attempt to redeem the Scottish Enlightenment tradition of moral philosophy through the creation of an ‘ideologically neutral’ space in which the development of a new cultural subjectivity can be undertaken.

This intellectual practice seeks to provide moral guidance to a bourgeois readership struggling to come to terms with the unsettling cultural changes of industrialism. As Carlyle writes in a passage that gives the essay its biblically-resonant title, the role of the bourgeois cultural critic is to be one of defensive moral prophesy, calmly tracing the outlines of the new moral disquiet in industrial society:

We were wise indeed, could we discern truly the signs of our own time; and by knowledge of its wants and advantages, *wisely adjust our own position in it*. Let us, instead of gazing idly into the obscure distance, look calmly around us, for a little, on the perplexed scene where we stand. Perhaps, on a more serious inspection, something of its perplexity will disappear, some of its distinctive characters and deepened tendencies more clearly reveal themselves;

whereby our own relations to it, our own true aims and endeavours in it, may also become clearer (my emphasis).¹⁵⁶

The emphasis is on ideological integration rather than social transformation. In vivid, impressionistic descriptions later in the essay we will see how Carlyle further encourages his readers to a form of individuated cultural praxis that abandons any serious engagement with political and economic struggle.

At one level Carlyle's social criticism takes direct issue with some of the major aims of the Scottish Enlightenment. In his moralistic critique of industrial modernity, he fundamentally questions the great Baconian project of physical transformation and economic development that animated the social philosophy of Adam Smith and, by implication, the project of popular economic and scientific education of his post-Enlightenment intellectual colleague in the *Edinburgh Review*, Henry Brougham. For Carlyle the dominant theme of the period is mechanical: 'It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends.'¹⁵⁷ He is implicitly reacting against the kind of instrumentalism promoted by the SDUK here, showing an acute sensitivity towards the dehumanizing aspects of industrial capitalism. Indeed, in this particular respect his criticism echoes the social analysis of Cobbett or, in another sense anticipates the narrative of historical materialism to be found in such seminal works of the mid-century as Marx and Engels's *German Ideology* (1846) and *Communist Manifesto* (1848): 'On every hand, the living artisan is driven from workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply faster.'¹⁵⁸ This analysis of the alienating processes of industrial capitalism, however, quickly gives way to a more general—and politically disabling—disenchantment with the mechanical feats associated with modernity: 'Men have crossed oceans by steam; the Birmingham Fire-king has visited the fabulous East; and the genius of the Cape, were there any Camoens [sic] now to sing it, has again been alarmed, and with far stranger thunders than Gama's. There is no end to machinery.'¹⁵⁹ This

description leads to only a cursory consideration of the new social order being forged by these processes. Carlyle seems to surrender this responsibility to those intellectual functionaries of the Scottish Enlightenment, the political economists: 'What changes, too, this addition of power is introducing into the Social System; how wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor, will be a question for Political Economists, and a much more complex and important one than any they have yet engaged with.'¹⁶⁰ With this observation Carlyle both completes and re-figures the Scottish Enlightenment intellectual project. From this point on, he implies, direct ideological confrontation is no longer possible, only the peaceful management of an anxious bourgeois readership into an economically transformed age. The social masses displaced by the new social processes of industrial capitalism remain safely out of sight in his critique. This abandonment of 'distasteful' materialist critique to the political economists, perhaps to his colleagues in the *Edinburgh Review*, exemplifies the ideologically insidious nature of this form of cultural criticism. Whilst acknowledging the 'complex and important' question of material inequality, Carlyle refuses to engage directly with the issue in his own intellectual practice here.¹⁶¹

Making a quick escape from the material reality of industrial capitalism, Carlyle's focus shifts to a consideration of the interior state of men under this mechanical tyranny. He writes: 'Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also.'¹⁶² This move from material analysis to idealist meditation represents both the beginning and the end of Carlyle's response to industrialism in the essay. This will become a classic tactic in bourgeois cultural criticism for the remainder of the century, moving as it does from an engagement with the epistemological foundations of capitalism to a concern only for the distorted social ontology it creates. The transition also foreshadows the cultural strategy of *Bildung* Carlyle will seek to employ later in the essay in his attempt to negate industrialism's corrosive morality.

In the main body of the essay Carlyle moves on to attack the proliferating public institutions of reason as being part of this 'mechanical' approach to liberation. The social bases of intellectual publicness are rejected as a fundamentally flawed means to achieving his aim of individual spiritual salvation: 'Has any man, or any society of men, a truth to speak, a piece of spiritual work to do; they can nowise proceed at once and with the mere natural organs, but must first call a public meeting, appoint committees, issue prospectuses, eat a public dinner; in a word, construct or borrow machinery, where with to speak it and do it.'¹⁶³ In a striking example of self-effacement (for an essay written in the most prominent journal of the British public sphere), Carlyle extends this critique of the institutions of public reason to include the very material products of the public sphere, the journals themselves. He writes: 'Mark, too how every machine must have its moving power, in some of the great currents of society; every little sect among us must have its Periodical, its monthly or quarterly Magazine;--hanging out, like its windmill, into the *popularisaura*, to grind the meal for the society.'¹⁶⁴ He mocks cultural institutions like the Philosophic Institutes, Royal Societies and Bibliothèques as 'well finished hives, to which it is expected the stray agencies of Wisdom will swarm of their own accord, and hive and make honey'.¹⁶⁵ This disillusionment with the formal social institutions of reason is perhaps less surprising than it first appears. Carlyle, unlike Jeffrey and Brougham, had little *direct* experience of the equivalent intellectual sites in the Scottish Enlightenment public sphere, instead relying on private and solitary study for his intellectual and cultural development in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh.¹⁶⁶

In a crucial passage, Carlyle describes how man's internal state has become corrupted by this all-encompassing march of machinery, both industrial and cultural. In its place he promotes a radical cultural discourse of 'truth-seeking', it would seem, to counteract contemporary efforts of radical political action. Like so much in 'Signs of the Times,' it is worth quoting at length:

These things, which we state lightly enough here, are yet of deep import, and indicate a mighty change in our whole manner of existence. For the same

habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. *Not for internal perfection*, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions, ---for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle (my emphasis).¹⁶⁷

‘Mechanism’ in this stage of Carlyle’s meditation becomes a powerful metaphor for industrialism’s spiritually alienating processes. As Klancher has noted in his illuminating reading of the essay, Carlyle’s ‘master sign’ functions to collapse industrialism’s material realities into a complex system of abstractions for the reader to decipher: “‘Mechanism’ is here no ordinary sign, but a powerful master sign. A master sign deprives objects, ideas, or ideologies of their apparent distinctiveness: beneath the seemingly irreducible proper nouns lurks a leveling, homogenizing process that works the same way in each of its dissimilar hosts.”¹⁶⁸ In opposition to this metaphysically powerful idea of ‘Mechanism’, Carlyle suggests a renewed interior subjectivity. This move to the cultural politics of personal cultivation introduces a seminal concept in the British tradition of bourgeois cultural criticism—the idea of a socially transcendent yet individually achieved ‘inner perfection’—that would animate critics from Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin in the nineteenth century, to F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot in the twentieth.¹⁶⁹ Significantly for Carlyle’s overall system of cultural critique, this conception of inner perfection is placed in direct opposition to the external arrangements of industrial society. Gloomily, he asserts that this corroding power of Mechanism has penetrated into the heart of the heroic intellectual disciplines of Enlightenment Europe, leaving Scottish exemplars like the *Philosophy of Mind* falling ‘suddenly into decay’ and dying out ‘with its last amiable cultivator, Professor Stewart’.¹⁷⁰ Only Germany has managed to escape this fatal decline in its intellectual life with its extraordinary flowering of post-Kantian aesthetic writing. This decline of the moral sciences in the rest of Europe leaves a vacuum in its intellectual life that Carlyle intends to fill with a new discourse of cultural criticism; itself an unlikely

fusion of a 'decaying' Scottish Common Sense philosophical tradition with German Romantic Idealism.¹⁷¹

Carlyle's reconstruction of bourgeois cultural subjectivity is clearly based on the principles of German Romantic Idealism. He speaks of a redemptive science of 'Dynamics' moving dialectically with that of 'Mechanics'. This new moral science 'practically addresses, the primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion, all which have a truly vital and *infinite* character'.¹⁷² Carlyle is outlining here what the Canadian moral philosopher Charles Taylor has termed 'Romantic expressivism'. In his landmark morphology of the modern intellectual personality, *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor defines Romantic expressivism as part of the morally affirmative cultural language of the modern age, a discourse that 'arises in protest against the Enlightenment ideal of disengaged, instrumental reason and the forms of moral and social life that flow from this: a one dimensional hedonism and atomism'.¹⁷³ For Taylor this influential cultural discourse 'continues throughout the nineteenth century in different forms, and it becomes ever more relevant as society is transformed by capitalist industrialism in a more and more atomist and instrumental direction'.¹⁷⁴ Although Taylor traces this modern secular theology of spiritual redemption in a British context from the high Victorian cultural criticism of Matthew Arnold, I would argue that its first expression can be found in Carlyle's *Edinburgh Review* essay some forty years before the publication of *Culture and Anarchy*. Terry Eagleton has described this intellectual practice in the Romantic period as 'disinterestedness as a revolutionary force, the production of a powerful yet decentred human subject which cannot be formalized within the protocols of rational exchange'.¹⁷⁵ This revolutionary new form of Romantic cultural praxis, as Eagleton the Marxist critic well knows, could also serve to endorse political quietism and moral despair at a time of potential social transformation.

This new cultural discourse is made up of everything that capitalist rationalization challenges or rejects: religious faith, artistic creativity, and organic development. Carlyle insists these characteristics 'originated in the Dynamical nature of man, not in Mechanical nature'.¹⁷⁶ He constructs a philosophy of history around this idea of man's 'Dynamic' expression:

...we will venture to say that no high attainment, not even any far-extending movement among men, was ever accomplished otherwise... if we read History with any degree of thoughtfulness, we shall find, that the checks and balances of Profit and Loss have never been the grand agents with men... only the passionate voice of one man, the rapt soul looking through the eyes of one man; and rugged, steel-clad Europe trembled beneath his words, and followed him whither he listed.¹⁷⁷

This profoundly Idealist conception of history locates social change not through political struggle with the forces of material necessity, but abstractly in the passionate moral prophesy of individual heroic men speaking with universal resonance across history.¹⁷⁸ Reversing the trajectory of the Marxian theory of historical consciousness, Carlyle argues that 'man is not the creature and product of Mechanism; but, in a far truer sense, its creator and producer: it is the noble People that makes the noble Government; rather than conversely'.¹⁷⁹ Carlyle is outlining a cultural project in which a transformed individual moral subjectivity becomes the defining, dynamic force in industrial society, or as he puts it, the 'Moral Force, which is the parent of all other Force'.¹⁸⁰ However, this transformation can only be achieved through a studied disavowal of the material reality of industrial society and a concomitant privileging of the divine and spiritual powers of man. This highly individualized conception of cultural praxis rejects the very idea of practical collective action as a means to combating the reifying processes of industrial capitalism, and instead places hope for any kind of social transformation in the transcendental power of men working to improve themselves from within, through moral self-education and the cultivation of these 'Dynamic' creative powers. Carlyle explains: 'For the plain truth, very plain, we think, is, that minds are opposed to minds in a quite different way; and *one* man that has a higher Wisdom, a hitherto unknown spiritual Truth in him, is stronger, not than

ten men that have it not, or than ten thousand, but than *all* men that have it not...'¹⁸¹

Carlyle is proposing a highly cultivated elite to function as a kind of moral compensation for the leveling social effects of industrialism, rather than challenging the material and structural bases of its domination. By examining the absence of material reality in Carlyle's 'revolutionary' critical discourse we gain a clearer picture of the reactionary ideology that animates this expression of bourgeois cultural politics in the early nineteenth century.

Carlyle develops his idea of Romantic cultural praxis in the final portion of the essay. A key element in this re-orientation of bourgeois subjectivity is his assimilation of traditional religious faith into a new conception of imaginative literature. Carlyle laments the decline of religion in the advancing industrial societies of Europe, because with it, he suggests, societies lose 'the fountain of all Goodness, Beauty, Truth'.¹⁸² The empty secularism that replaces it is merely 'a wise prudential feeling grounded on mere calculation; a matter, as all others now are, of Expediency and Utility; whereby some smaller quantum of earthly enjoyment may be exchanged for a far larger quantum of celestial enjoyment'.¹⁸³ Returning to a theme from the opening of the essay, Carlyle recognizes that the new cultural and intellectual institutions of modernity have displaced the morally legitimating power of religion with what Habermas identified in *Structural Transformation* as the force of rationalism: 'The true Church of England, at this moment, lies in the Editors of its Newspapers. These preach to the people daily, weekly; admonishing kings themselves; advising peace or war, with an authority which only the first Reformers, and a long-past class of Popes, were possessed of; inflicting moral censure; imparting moral encouragement, consolation, edification; in all ways diligently "administering the Discipline of the Church"'.¹⁸⁴ This analysis by Carlyle is profoundly self-reflexive. By articulating this paradigm shift in modern British culture to a wide and influential readership through the vehicle of the *Edinburgh Review*, Carlyle tacitly illustrates the new powers of ideological legitimation wielded by 'public moralists' like himself.

Carlyle concludes his essay with an appeal for spiritual enlightenment in modern society. Industrial modernity's emphasis on material progress is for Carlyle a contemporary expression of a universal tendency in civilization for moral weakness. As he puts it: 'This faith in Mechanism, in the all-importance of physical things, is in every age the common refuge of Weakness and blind Discontent; of all who believe, as many will ever do, that man's true good lies without him, not within.'¹⁸⁵ However, in a deft maneuver that recovers some of the historical optimism of his Scottish Enlightenment predecessors, he also embraces the tangible material benefits that this same process of industrial modernity brings: 'Doubtless this age also is advancing. Its very unrest, its ceaseless activity, its discontent contains matter of promise. Knowledge, education are opening the eyes of the humblest; are increasing the number of thinking minds without limit. This is as it should be; for not in turning back, not in resisting, but only in resolutely struggling forward, does our life consist.'¹⁸⁶ By writing these words in the *Edinburgh Review*—the most visible residual cultural product of the Scottish Enlightenment in the nineteenth century—I suggest that Carlyle was placing a guarded hope in the philosophical project that he found so limited and morally instrumental throughout the body of the essay. One may even go so far as to suggest that Carlyle was hoping to 'rescue' the moral project of the Scottish Enlightenment by supplementing its material aims with an appropriation of German Idealism that he hoped would encourage more individuated forms of ideological integration. This selective acceptance of modernity's narrative of progress allows Carlyle to shift the terms of engagement from one of social transformation to moral perception. Spiritual disenchantment with industrialism need not be a permanent state, he suggests: 'This deep, paralysed subjection to physical objects comes not from Nature, but from our own unwise mode of *viewing* nature.'¹⁸⁷ This is the essence of Carlyle's conception of bourgeois cultural praxis in this essay. Reification can be overcome, he implies here, through a transformation in personal subjectivity. For Carlyle, man's 'mere freedom from oppression from his fellow-mortal' is of a secondary nature; it is the reconstruction of the

self by the cultivation of the 'higher freedom' of imagination that will provide true emancipation.¹⁸⁸ He ends the essay with a powerful injunction to self-improvement that neatly summarizes this project of bourgeois cultural criticism: 'To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on *himself*.'¹⁸⁹

How do we finally assess the meaning of Carlyle's essay in the specific intellectual context of early nineteenth-century Britain? Three important recent readings have focused variably on the philosophical, institutional and textual agendas being worked through in 'Signs of the Times'. The first two make compelling cases for Carlyle's place both within and against the intellectual traditions of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ralph Jessop, in his key revisionist study, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, challenges the predominantly German Idealist trajectory of Carlyle studies since the 1934 publication of C.F. Harrold's *Carlyle and German Thought*. Jessop's Common Sense reading of 'Signs of the Times' suggests that previous interpretations have underplayed the important influence of the intuitionist tradition of Scottish moral philosophy initiated by Thomas Reid, and perpetuated by Dugald Stewart and Sir William Hamilton. David Allan's *Learning, Virtue, and the Scottish Enlightenment* (1993), conversely argues that 'Signs of the Times' actually marked a post-Enlightenment resurgence of the early modern Scottish intellectual tradition of moral leadership. The third reading, enacted in Jon Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, interprets the essay as part of a wider cultural shift in the relationship between readers and critics in the early nineteenth century. I will briefly engage with the arguments presented by these readings as a way of making my own case for Carlyle's essay as an example of a defensive new discourse of bourgeois cultural criticism in the British public sphere.

Jessop argues that Carlyle's intellectual posture in 'Signs of the Times' was first mediated through the Common Sense responses to Humean skepticism. He stresses that the internal post-Enlightenment dialectic being worked out by Carlyle in 'Signs of the

'Times' was part of this larger academic debate in Scottish moral philosophy: 'Many of the deepest concerns of the Scottish school—materialism, skepticism, the metaphorical status of mind terminology, and several other related issues—were inherited by Carlyle.'¹⁹⁰

Indeed, this reading has greatly informed my own, particularly in the valuable way it re-connects Carlyle's essay to the general stream of philosophical discourse emanating from the *Edinburgh Review* in the early nineteenth century. Jessop writes of the importance of the periodical as a key mediating influence on Carlyle: 'The pages of the *Edinburgh Review*... reveal that the discourse of some of their principal reviewers was in part informed by the philosophies of Hume and Reid.'¹⁹¹ Jessop suggests that in 'Signs of the Times' Carlyle was acknowledging the profound influence these thinkers had on collective intellectual perceptions of the new mechanical spirit of the age. It is clear that Carlyle's despair at the contemporary intellectual and cultural situation was based on his conviction that a particular strain of Scottish Enlightenment philosophical discourse—materialist, skeptical and narrowly empirical—had come to dominate not only the minds of advanced European civilization, but its soul as well. Jessop's contribution has been to interpret Carlyle's disillusion in the essay dialectically. Rather than representing a wholesale rejection of contemporary philosophical discourse in his time, Carlyle's argument in the essay suggests a cautious affiliation with the Common Sense counter-tradition in the Scottish Enlightenment.

This reading has the benefit of placing Carlyle firmly in the local Edinburgh public sphere of the 1820s. Rather than being portrayed as a detached Romantic Sage, he emerges as an intellectual partisan in the complex and contested tradition of Scottish moral philosophy; particularly in its rupture between a Humean skepticism that seemingly accepted the ugly social and moral realities of liberal capitalist society as a necessary accompaniment to the freedoms of the commercial age, and an emphatic Reidian response that stressed the need for a spiritually based critique of materialism, transience and abstract reason. For Jessop, 'Signs of the Times' is Carlyle's own idiosyncratic version of

Common Sense philosophy as anti-industrial social criticism, a discourse in which he 'made his own appeals to Common Sense as the antithesis of the Mechanical Age and mechanistic philosophy'.¹⁹²

In Jessop's reading we are encouraged to see the work as much as a philosophical interrogation as it was social critique, or at any rate a highly mediated response to the cultural crisis of industrialism in the first third of the nineteenth century. Carlyle focuses his attacks on the dominant epistemology of the age—Utilitarianism—because he wishes to cure the visible symptoms of nihilism that it fosters. In short, he finds that the ideological roots of British Industrialism, with its heartless emphasis on expediency and efficiency, lay in the empiricist trajectory that Scottish Enlightenment discourse had taken since Hume. Significantly, Jessop sees Carlyle in 'Signs of the Times' as anticipating Sir William Hamilton's comprehensive critique of the materialistic epistemology of the age found in his pioneering essays for the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁹³ Carlyle's essay was, however, more than simply an academic contribution to the Common Sense critique of Humean skepticism. He was also searching for a new secular faith to replace the shambolic one propagated by 'Philosophers of the age' like Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. Rather than construct a new epistemology, Carlyle wished to re-establish faith as a guiding force in modern society. This was a force that, as Carlyle put it in the essay, 'inculcates on men the necessity and infinite worth of moral goodness, the great truth that our happiness depends on the mind which is within us, and not on the circumstances which are without us...'¹⁹⁴ As Jessop skillfully shows throughout his study, this larger search by Carlyle, of which 'Signs of the Times' is only one part, did not take place in some abstract world of ideas between German Idealism and Scottish Common Sense. Through Carlyle's interaction with intellectual companions like Hamilton, Edward Irving and Francis Jeffrey in the Edinburgh of the 1820s, Jessop demonstrates that he was a full participant in the dynamic public sphere of post-Enlightenment Scotland. It must be said, however, that despite the impressive interpretive powers Jessop's reading of 'Signs of the Times' display, his

discussion rather too neatly manages to assimilate the immense political and social contradictions of the emerging bourgeois ideology of 'Culture' into a Common Sense philosophical position of 'mind-body dualism' that 'provides the basis of its very balance or moderation'.¹⁹⁵

David Allan's post-Enlightenment reading of 'Signs of the Times' yields some important new observations on Carlyle's place within an older Scottish intellectual tradition. Allan traces Carlyle's Romantic pessimism in the essay to the young intellectual's awareness of the morally flawed modernity unleashed through the theories of some of the central thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment like Adam Smith, David Hume and Adam Ferguson. Referring specifically to Smith's doctrine of 'unintended consequences', Allan suggests it was the immediate context of the Enlightenment's moral failure in the early nineteenth century that spurred Carlyle's defensive cultural position in the essay: 'Carlyle openly lamented in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829 the apparently consummate failure of heroic morality and human creativity... this failure had been brought about, in Carlyle's eyes, not by the fleeting triumph of reason but by the accompanying mechanistic and scientific determinism of the wider Enlightenment, the very trend which we have seen implicated in the final dominance of unintention.'¹⁹⁶ Allan argues that Carlyle's posture in the essay revives 'an older, more vigorous notion of spontaneity and moral leadership' in Scottish society that pre-dated the emergence of the Enlightenment.¹⁹⁷ According to this interpretation, Carlyle's public lament represented both a final break with the epistemological assumptions of his Enlightenment predecessors, and one of the first articulations of a compelling post-Enlightenment discourse of moral repentance: 'Rational virtue, it was being concluded, was either untrustworthy or even impotent. It certainly looked incapable, least of all, of delivering the orderly moral regeneration of a dynamic industrial society beset by seemingly continual war and chronic political uncertainty, Scotland's once confident "Age of Reason", perhaps, could do little else in these circumstances but fall apart catastrophically from within.'¹⁹⁸ For Allan, it was the dramatic

cultural changes wrought by industrial modernity that shook the intellectual elite of post-Enlightenment Edinburgh into new ways of conceiving their social function. Unlike their forebears in the high Enlightenment period they needed an entirely new intellectual language to respond to this dramatic transformation. Although Allan never quite puts it in these terms, I suggest that it was the discourse of bourgeois cultural criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* that provided such a language.

As the reader has probably deduced from the reading of 'Signs of the Times' in this chapter, I have taken on board both of these interpretations, but have chosen to direct my efforts at demonstrating the degree to which Carlyle's essay represented a new mode of intellectual practice. With Jessop I believe that Carlyle was indeed drawing upon an inherited philosophical tradition to express his dissatisfaction with contemporary intellectual responses to industrialism. However, I argue that Carlyle's attempt to reconcile the moral conflict at the heart of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophical tradition through his balancing of material progress with personal development, led him to embrace a highly individuated notion of cultural praxis in the public sphere.¹⁹⁹ Influenced by Gregory Maertz's mapping of Carlyle's early intellectual development within the larger context of European Romanticism, I believe that the epistemological foundations of Carlyle's new discourse of cultural criticism owe as much to his assimilation of German Romantic aesthetics as they do to Scottish Common Sense philosophy, and that it was indeed the former intellectual tradition that provided him with a 'revolutionary' new theory of intellectual subjectivity from which to confront the spiritual alienation of industrial society.

David Allan's post-Enlightenment reading of 'Signs of the Times' has also influenced my interpretation of Carlyle's intellectual posture in the essay. As the argument in chapter three of this study reflects, I concur with Allan that the transition from a high Scottish Enlightenment intellectual community centred around institutions like the reformed Kirk, the ancient universities, and the debating societies, to a post-Scottish Enlightenment community of critics based around the *Edinburgh Review* created the need for a new

discourse of moral leadership, which I see reflected in the cultural criticism of the bourgeois public sphere. I would further argue that the vacuum of moral leadership that existed during the post-Enlightenment years of Carlyle's intellectual maturation forced the young critic to develop new strategies of engagement with his imagined cultural community of readers in the public sphere. This focus on the essay as a manifestation of a new *structure* of discourse emerging in the British public sphere of the early nineteenth century has been developed in Jon Klancher's remarkable comparative study, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*.

Klancher suggests that 'Signs of the Times' was the most compelling example of an entirely new kind of critical discourse in the bourgeois public sphere. He argues that Carlyle's unique use of a metaphorical 'master sign' in the essay—that of 'Mechanism'—was part of a more general effort during the time by middle-class intellectuals to create a new language of symbolic cultural mediation for their readers. He writes: 'Readers of this essay in the *Edinburgh Review*'s June 1829 edition must have recognized in "Signs of the Times" a rather extreme version of so many writers' efforts in the 1820s to read modern times through the social and cultural signs they forged.'²⁰⁰ The new master sign created by Carlyle in the essay, Klancher argues, 'generates a new form of social critique, a powerful new way to see through the foggy "perplexity" this writer set out to penetrate'.²⁰¹ For Klancher, whose concern in the study is centred as much on the new ways readers constructed this emergent discourse as it is with tracing new modes of intellectual practice in the public sphere, the ideological power of this form of bourgeois cultural criticism lay in the way it provided its audience with access to new forms of cultural power: 'The middle-class audience achieves its sense of cultural power by continually dismantling and reconstructing signs, but not without a recurring anxiety about its own act.'²⁰² By collapsing the social conflict produced by industrial capitalism into a symbolic system of signs, this form of bourgeois cultural criticism was able to function as a cathartic surrogate for the moral anxieties of its anxious middle-class readers. Indeed, Klancher suggests that

it is precisely such an interactive cultural dynamic that helps to establish this kind of social criticism as the dominant form of ideological mediation in the bourgeois public sphere of the nineteenth century: 'From Coleridge to Matthew Arnold, this fear of saturation, repetition, and fragmentation haunts the middle-class audience and its critics even as its writers form the affirming and critical interpretive modes of its cultural power.'²⁰³ The ideological aim of the new cultural criticism initiated by Carlyle in 'Signs of the Times' was to substitute a personalized 'cultural holism' for the unsettling social transformations enacted by industrial capitalism. Klancher describes this process as 'Redeeming social and psychological fragmentation by recollectively bouncing back toward a fusion with the self's own ultimate ground...'²⁰⁴ It is this transformation of social and political conflict into a struggle for personal moral development that made the discourse of bourgeois cultural criticism developed in 'Signs of the Times' such an ideologically seductive form of symbolic praxis in the early nineteenth century.

In 1831 Carlyle published his last major essay in the *Edinburgh Review*. The article, 'Characteristics', was a complex consolidation of the idealist intellectual subjectivity he had developed in 'Signs of the Times'.²⁰⁵ It was a deeply self-reflexive work concerned with the role of periodical criticism in the new bourgeois institutions of imaginative literature. The essay served to advance the synthesis of metaphysical speculation and aestheticized social critique as the dominant paradigm in bourgeois cultural criticism. With the outline of the cultural project set for him by his mentor Jeffrey now completed, the leading Germanist of the *Edinburgh Review* looked to the larger intellectual stage of London for his destiny. Although his departure in 1834 was a severe blow to Scottish cultural history and signaled the demise of the dynamic liberal public sphere in Edinburgh, his arrival in London served as a great catalyst for British Victorian intellectual culture as a whole. With Carlyle's new base in the British capital the remarkable intellectual energy of the post-Enlightenment public sphere had finally switched its locus from the 'cultural province' of Edinburgh to the metropolitan setting of London.

In 1832 Carlyle's colleagues from the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey and Henry Brougham, were also capitalizing upon their new ideological authority within the new British establishment to help direct the passage and implementation of the Reform Bill. Brougham's role as Lord Chancellor placed him at the centre of the debate in the House of Lords over the Bill's fate. Similarly, Jeffrey's position as Lord Advocate for Scotland meant that he was the prime legal representative of the Whig Government's reform plans north of the border. Both men represented the liberal wing in a moderate Whig reform movement which, whilst attacking the recalcitrance displayed by the King and the Lords, was also desperate to contain the more radical elements demanding a much wider and deeper reform of British democracy. Carlyle's position was both more reactionary and apocalyptic than his former social mentor Jeffrey and academic referee Brougham. He lamented the bill in characteristically idealist terms: 'Vain hope to make men happy by Politics!'.²⁰⁶

The time of the Bill's passage was pregnant with the promise of open political and social conflict. For the typical bourgeois readers of the *Edinburgh Review*, many of whom would also become key beneficiaries of the limited property-based franchise proposed in the Bill, this turbulent episode cried out for an ameliorative cultural project that would help ease their way into the political unknown. I suggest that Carlyle's discourse of cultural criticism in part helped in the peaceful ideological integration of this newly hegemonic middle-class readership into the developing institutions of British democracy. Brougham famously described this potential constituency in his speech during the second reading of the Bill as 'the middle-classes... those hundreds of thousands of respectable persons—the most numerous and by far the most wealthy order in the community' with 'vast and solid riches' who were 'the genuine depositories of sober, rational, intelligent, and honest English feeling...'²⁰⁷ A better description of the kind of aspirational readership cultivated by the *Edinburgh Review* cannot be found. With reform demonstrations of over 100,000 organized by the working classes in London, Birmingham, and Edinburgh desperate for

middle-class sympathy, liberal leaders like Brougham could only respond instrumentally, and in the words of E.P. Thompson, used such demonstrations to ‘blackmail’ their reluctant colleagues into accepting a flawed political compromise.²⁰⁸ Thompson describes the middle-class consciousness that emerged with the first Reform Bill as ‘more conservative, more wary of the large idealist causes (except perhaps those of other nations), more narrowly self-interested than in any other industrialised nation’.²⁰⁹

In the final page of his monumental study Thompson decries the missed opportunity of the most advanced forms of bourgeois cultural praxis—what he calls the ‘great Romantic criticism of Utilitarianism’—to combine with the political efforts of the Radical artisans on the ground in their struggle for emancipation against the dehumanizing forces of industrial capitalism.²¹⁰ He sadly observes of this missing political-cultural project of the early nineteenth century: ‘In the failure of the two traditions to come to a point of junction, something was lost. How much we cannot be sure, for we are among the losers.’²¹¹ What came in place of this lost cultural politics of solidarity was a discourse that attempted to aesthetically critique the effects of industrialism without engaging with its underlying causes. Perhaps even more politically disarming was the way this discourse functioned as a primary source of ideological integration into the new British state. Speaking of this new form of bourgeois cultural politics pioneered by Carlyle and later developed by Arnold, David Lloyd and Paul Thomas argue: ‘Culture is not a mere supplement to the state but the formative principle of its efficacy. It is, in other words a principal instrument of hegemony... Arnold’s work is embedded in practice and in theory with the work of the state and is instrumental as well as influential in the forging of a new mode of hegemony.’²¹² I am suggesting that with the culmination of the Scottish Enlightenment discourse of political and social improvement in the official legislative action of the Reform Act, a fundamental displacement was enacted, both at the official level of the British state and at the unofficial, yet ideologically determinant level of the bourgeois public sphere. For the middle-class readers of the *Edinburgh Review* this displacement pushed an

agenda of radical social transformation into the realm of private cultural politics. Locating a politically transformative cultural politics will be the task of the next chapter, when I examine the conception of cultural praxis in the early nineteenth century plebeian public sphere.

NOTES

¹ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 51.

² Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 55.

³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, pp. 55-6.

⁴ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 56.

⁵ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 3.

⁶ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 52.

⁷ Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, p. 217.

⁸ See Maurice Cross, 'A Preliminary Dissertation on the Progress of Periodical Literature; and the History, Principles, and Tendency of the *Edinburgh Review*', in *Selections from the Edinburgh Review: Comprising the Best Articles in That Journal from its Commencement to the Present Time*, ed. by Maurice Cross, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, 1833), pp. ix-cxxvii; James Greig, *Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948); John Clive, 'The *Edinburgh Review*: 150 Years After', *History Today*, 2 (1952), 844-50; Thomas Crawford, *The Edinburgh Review and Romantic Poetry, 1802-1829*, Auckland University College Bulletin No. 47, English Series No. 8 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1955); Bioncamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society: The Edinburgh Review, 1802-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁹ Ralph Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 54.

¹⁰ George Davie, 'The Social Significance of the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense', *The Dow Lectures*, 30 November 1972 (Edinburgh: T.A. Constable, 1973), pp. 4-23 (p. 16).

¹¹ Henry Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1852), p. 111.

¹² For Jeffrey's encouragement of Carlyle in this, see Thomas Carlyle, *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by K.J. Fielding and others, vol. 4 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), p. 228; and for an explanation by Jeffrey of his use of the phrase 'condition of English society' see Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, vol. 2, p. 160.

¹³ See Jürgen Habermas, 'Conservatism and Capitalist Crisis', in *Autonomy and Solidarity*, ed. by Peter Dews (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 63-76 (p. 64).

¹⁴ Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, p. 7.

¹⁵ See Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, pp. 79-96.

¹⁶ Donald Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils', in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study In Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, written with Stefan Collini and John Burrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 25-61 (p. 25).

¹⁷ For a vivid contemporary description of Stewart's famed lectures see Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1856; facsim. repr. Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1988), pp. 22-6.

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- ¹⁸ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, p. 176.
- ¹⁹ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History*, pp. 223-224.
- ²⁰ See Dugald Stewart, 'The Unity of the Sciences' from *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, (London, 1867), repr. in *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1997), pp. 44-60.
- ²¹ A more general interpretation of the Hume-Reid epistemological dispute can be found in Keith Lehrer, 'Beyond Impressions and Ideas: Hume vs Reid', in *The 'Science of Man' in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and Their Contemporaries*, ed. by Peter Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 108-123.
- ²² George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), p. 274.
- ²³ Davie, *The Democratic Intellect*, p. 275; Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 105.
- ²⁴ See Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, pp. 142-54.
- ²⁵ See Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr Reid*, in *Enlightened Scotland: A Study and Selection of Scottish Philosophical Prose from the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, pp. 69-76 (p. 74).
- ²⁶ Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr Reid*, p. 74.
- ²⁷ David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 238-39.
- ²⁸ See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, pp. 51-2.
- ²⁹ Francis Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid, D.D., F.R.S., Edinburgh, late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, by Dugald Stewart, F.R.S.', in *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1844), pp. 322-37 (p. 322) (first publ. *Edinburgh Review*, 3 (1804), 269-87) .
- ³⁰ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 323.
- ³¹ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 323.
- ³² See Nicholas Phillipson, 'The Pursuit of Virtue in Scottish University Education: Dugald Stewart and Scottish Moral Philosophy in the Enlightenment', in *Universities, Society and the Future*, ed. by Nicholas Phillipson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), pp. 82-101 (p. 84).
- ³³ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 325.
- ³⁴ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 327.
- ³⁵ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 328.
- ³⁶ Jeffrey, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid', p. 328.

³⁷ Crawford argues that Jeffrey cultivated a unique programme of Romantic aesthetics through a coordinated effort that included an attack on the poetry of the Augustans, support for the second generation of Romantic poets, and his famous critique of the Lake School. See Thomas Crawford, *The Edinburgh Review and Romantic Poetry*, pp. 36-39. A similar argument is made by John O. Hayden in his important revisionist study, *The Romantic Reviewers: 1802-1824* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

³⁸ Francis Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays. By Dugald Stewart, Esq., F.R.S., Edinburgh, Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh', in *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, vol. 3., pp. 373-94 (p. 373) (first publ. in *Edinburgh Review*, 17 (1810), 167-211).

³⁹ Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 373.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 374.

⁴¹ Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 374.

⁴² Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 375.

⁴³ Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 375.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey, 'Philosophical Essays', p. 392.

⁴⁵ Donald Winch, 'The System of the North', p. 54.

⁴⁶ For a dramatic recent account of the Luddite crisis that draws striking parallels with contemporary movements of resistance to capitalism see Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against The Future: The Luddites and Their War On the Industrial Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

⁴⁷ See W. Hamish Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Fraser, *Scottish Popular Politics*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ It is significant that Jeffrey later chose this essay as being the most representative of his critical development for that period. See notes, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Brown and Green, 1844), p. 79.

⁵⁰ Francis Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions Sociales. Par Mad. de Staël-Holstein', *Edinburgh Review*, 21 (1813), 1-50 (pp. 2-3).

⁵¹ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 3.

⁵² Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 4.

⁵³ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 6.

⁵⁴ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', pp. 6-7.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 7.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 7.

⁵⁷ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 7.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 10.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 12.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 16.

⁶¹ In the preface to his *Contributions To The Edinburgh Review* (1844), Jeffrey summarized the intended moral effect of his criticism in a manner that bears a striking resemblance to Mill's later doctrine of higher pleasures from *On Liberty*: '... it was by having constantly endeavoured to combine Ethical precepts with Literary Criticism, and earnestly sought to impress my readers with a sense, both of the close connection between sound Intellectual attainments and the higher elements of Duty and Enjoyment; and of the just and ultimate subordination of the former to the latter.' See Jeffrey, *Contributions To The Edinburgh Review*, vol. 1, p. x.

⁶² Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 17.

⁶³ Jeffrey was an enthusiastic advocate of Alison's work and expounded on his ideas in an earlier review in the journal. See Francis Jeffrey, 'Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, by Archibald Alison', *Edinburgh Review*, 18 (1811), 1-46. For a good discussion of Jeffrey's use of Alisonian ideas in his critical practice see W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), pp. 97-103.

⁶⁴ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 20.

⁶⁵ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 21.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey carried on a correspondence with Alison in the first decade of the nineteenth century before the publication of the second edition of *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*. See Peter F. Morgan, *Jeffrey's Criticism* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1983), p. 165.

⁶⁷ See Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, p. 98.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 23.

⁶⁹ See Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and the Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighborhood Renewal* (London: HMSO, September 1998).

⁷⁰ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 22.

⁷¹ Jeffrey, 'De la Littérature', p. 24.

⁷² Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure*, p. 132.

⁷³ Francis Jeffrey, 'Cobbett's Political Register', *Edinburgh Review*, 10 (1807), 386-421 (p. 386).

⁷⁴ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey, 'Cobbett's Political Register', p. 387.

⁷⁶ George Pottinger, *Heirs of the Enlightenment*, p. 102.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey, 'Cobbett's Political Register', p. 399.

⁷⁸ Simon, *The Two Nations*, p. 153.

⁷⁹ See Simon, *The Two Nations*, p. 154.

⁸⁰ See Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, p. 105. See also Johnson's argument throughout "'Really Useful Knowledge'", pp. 75-102.

⁸¹ Brougham wrote in a letter to Whig leader Earl Grey of the Peterloo Massacre, 'The magistrates there [in Manchester] and all over Lancashire I have long known for the worst in England, the most bigoted, violent and active. I am quite indignant at this Manchester business, but I fear, with you, that we can do nothing till parliament meets.' Quoted in 'Henry Brougham: Members of Parliament, 1750-1820', from the *Spartacus Internet Encyclopedia of British History, 1700-1950*, ed. Brian Simkin (Online: www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRbrougham.htm) 5 March 2000.

⁸² Brougham had previously written a shorter article on Hofwyl in the *Edinburgh Review* some ten months earlier. See *Edinburgh Review*, 31 (1818), 150-65.

⁸³ Henry Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', *Edinburgh Review*, 32 (1819), 487-507 (p. 489).

⁸⁴ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 492.

⁸⁵ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 492.

⁸⁶ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 492.

⁸⁷ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 493.

⁸⁸ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 493.

⁸⁹ Richard Johnson has noted the persistence of this theme amongst bourgeois educational reformers in the early Victorian period: '...their denunciation of working-class decadence--was a critical link in the diagnosis of the educational policy-makers. It provided them with their most powerful propagandizing argument within their own class... beyond "degradation" lay the threat of a spiraling crime-rate or even bloody anarchy.' See Richard Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', *Past and Present*, 49 (1970), 96-119 (p. 104).

⁹⁰ McCalman defines the popular urban culture of this urban underworld in a manner that explicitly links early nineteenth-century political radicalism its ideological heterodoxy with contemporary cultures of illegality: 'I have used the "radical underworld" as a convenient label for a loosely-linked, semi-clandestine network of political organisations, groups, coteries, and alliances, but it also has a more literal sense. "Underworld" is defined in a modern dictionary as "a submerged, hidden or secret region or sphere, especially one given to crime, profligacy and intrigue". It is apt because many of these ultras [Spenceans] were also connected in various ways with London's notorious underworld of crime and profligacy. Through activities such as theft, pimping, rape, blackmail and pornography they introduce us to a region where popular politics intersected with lumpen and professional crime.' See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 2.

⁹¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 719.

⁹² Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 497.

⁹³ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 497.

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- ⁹⁴ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', pp. 497-8.
- ⁹⁵ Brougham, 'Les Lettres de M. de Fellenberg', p. 502.
- ⁹⁶ See Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', p. 119.
- ⁹⁷ Henry Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', in *Selections from the Edinburgh Review*, vol. 2, pp. 582-91 (p. 582) (first publ. *Edinburgh Review*, 40 (1824), 99-117).
- ⁹⁸ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 583.
- ⁹⁹ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 583.
- ¹⁰⁰ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 584.
- ¹⁰¹ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 584.
- ¹⁰² Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 585.
- ¹⁰³ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 585.
- ¹⁰⁴ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 586.
- ¹⁰⁵ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 586.
- ¹⁰⁶ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 586.
- ¹⁰⁷ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 587.
- ¹⁰⁸ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 587.
- ¹⁰⁹ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 587.
- ¹¹⁰ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 588.
- ¹¹¹ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 588.
- ¹¹² See Johnson, "Really Useful Knowledge", p. 84.
- ¹¹³ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', p. 588.
- ¹¹⁴ See Johnson, "Really Useful Knowledge", p. 85.
- ¹¹⁵ Brougham, 'Report of Mechanics' Institutions', pp. 590-1.
- ¹¹⁶ See Henry Brougham, 'Library of Useful Knowledge', *Edinburgh Review*, 46 (1827), 225-44.
- ¹¹⁷ See Thomas Carlyle, 'Jean Paul Frederick Richter's Leben, nebst Charakteristik seiner werken; von Heinrich Doering', *Edinburgh Review*, 46 (1827), 304-51.
- ¹¹⁸ Maertz inaccurately places Carlyle in London during this period even though he didn't leave Scotland until 1834. Perhaps Maertz was referring to Carlyle's place in the wider metropolitan British public sphere of which London was the centre, through his critical presence in journals like the *Edinburgh Review*. See

Gregory Maertz, 'Carlyle's Mediation of Goethe and its European Context', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 24 (1997), 59-78 (p. 61).

¹¹⁹ See Thomas Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 3rd edn, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1847), pp. 25-84 (first publ. *Edinburgh Review*, 46 (1827), 304-51).

¹²⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, vol. 4, p. 249.

¹²¹ C.F. Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 75.

¹²² Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 27.

¹²³ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 29.

¹²⁴ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 35.

¹²⁵ See Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose,' and 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"', in *Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 41-60.

¹²⁶ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 38.

¹²⁷ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 39.

¹²⁸ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 39.

¹²⁹ See Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 31-6.

¹³⁰ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 39.

¹³¹ Maertz, 'Carlyle's Mediation of Goethe', p. 62.

¹³² Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 41.

¹³³ Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, p. 117.

¹³⁴ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 50.

¹³⁵ Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and State*, pp. 78-9.

¹³⁶ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 50.

¹³⁷ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 57.

¹³⁸ Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and State*, p. 79.

¹³⁹ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 72.

¹⁴⁰ Carlyle, 'State of German Literature', p. 74.

¹⁴¹ In a letter from May 1827 Carlyle confessed that his conception of metaphysics contained 'the oddest mixture of Scotch and German, Dugald Stewart and Immanuel Kant!' See Thomas Carlyle, *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, vol. 4, p. 225.

¹⁴² Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', p. 74.

¹⁴³ Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', p. 76.

¹⁴⁴ Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', pp. 77-8.

¹⁴⁵ Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', p. 79.

¹⁴⁶ Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', p. 82.

¹⁴⁷ Maertz, 'Carlyle's Mediation of Goethe', p. 67.

¹⁴⁸ Maertz, 'Carlyle's Mediation of Goethe', p. 66.

¹⁴⁹ Carlyle, 'The State of German Literature', pp. 83-4.

¹⁵⁰ Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 61.

¹⁵¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 72.

¹⁵² See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, pp. 47-75, for a discussion of this 'social text' in Romantic critical discourse. The titles of the texts under review may have suggested such an approach. They included *Anticipation; or a Hundred Years Hence*; *Rise, Progress, and Present State of Public Opinion in Great Britain*; and *The Last Days; or, Discourses on These Our Times*. However, this general social topic was not new to Carlyle in 1829. He had displayed an interest in broad social issues—what both he and his close early intellectual companion Edward Irving had called 'the condition of the people'—from conversations with Irving dating back to 1818. Indeed, the last of the texts mentioned above was by Irving himself. See J.A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle: A History of the First Forty Years of His Life, 1795-1835*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), p. 65.

¹⁵³ Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 3rd edn, vol. 2., pp. 56-81 (p. 58) (first publ. *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (1829), 439-59).

¹⁵⁴ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', pp. 56-7.

¹⁵⁵ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 57.

¹⁵⁶ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 59.

¹⁵⁷ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 59.

¹⁵⁸ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 59.

¹⁵⁹ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 59.

¹⁶⁰ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 60.

¹⁶¹ A more empathetic critique of industrialism from Carlyle would appear in the early 1840s with his extraordinary work of cultural historicism, *Past and Present*. See Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, ed. by Richard D. Altick (New York: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 139-235.

¹⁶² Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 60.

¹⁶³ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 61.

¹⁶⁴ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 61.

¹⁶⁵ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 62.

¹⁶⁶ Carlyle later remarked that the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh served as his 'principal or almost sole literary resource' during his formative intellectual years as a student in Edinburgh. See Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. by K.J. Fielding and Ian Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 429.

¹⁶⁷ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 62.

¹⁶⁸ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 71.

¹⁶⁹ For the best summary of this tradition see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 110-150; pp. 227-264.

¹⁷⁰ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 63.

¹⁷¹ Ironically, Common Sense philosophy would undergo a resurgence soon after Carlyle wrote this article. Sir William Hamilton published two essays in the *Edinburgh Review* within a year of 'Signs of the Times' that would make a lasting contribution to the Common Sense tradition. Indeed, by the time of Hamilton's death in 1856, the Common Sense school had become a major force in British academic philosophy. See Sir William Hamilton, 'Philosophy of the Unconditioned', *Edinburgh Review*, 50 (1829), 194-221; and 'Philosophy of Perception', *Edinburgh Review*, 52 (1830), 158-207. For Carlyle's account of his intellectual interactions with Hamilton in 1820s Edinburgh, see *Reminiscences*, pp. 428-33.

¹⁷² Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 68.

¹⁷³ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 413.

¹⁷⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 413.

¹⁷⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 41.

¹⁷⁶ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 69.

¹⁷⁷ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 70.

¹⁷⁸ Carlyle would more fully develop this philosophy of history in a series of lectures given in 1840 and published the following year under the title *Heroes and Hero Worship*. See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, ed. by Carl Niemeyer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

¹⁷⁹ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 71.

¹⁸⁰ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 72.

¹⁸¹ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 74.

¹⁸² Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 75.

¹⁸³ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', pp. 75-6.

¹⁸⁴ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 76.

¹⁸⁵ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 79.

¹⁸⁶ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 79.

¹⁸⁷ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 79.

¹⁸⁸ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 81.

¹⁸⁹ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 81.

¹⁹⁰ Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 54.

¹⁹¹ Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 54.

¹⁹² Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 145.

¹⁹³ Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, p. 143.

¹⁹⁴ Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', p. 66.

¹⁹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Jessop's argument see my article, 'Re-writing Carlyle and Scottish Cultural History', *The European Legacy*, 4 (1999), 106-111.

¹⁹⁶ David Allan, *Learning, Virtue and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 239.

¹⁹⁷ Allan, *Learning, Virtue and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 240.

¹⁹⁸ Allan, *Learning, Virtue and the Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 240.

¹⁹⁹ This interpretation has been influenced by Raymond Williams's still potent reading of 'Signs of the Times' from his 1958 study *Culture and Society*. Discussing the essay's balancing of progress with spiritual dignity, Williams writes: 'For us, now, such phrases as "the imperishable dignity of man... the high vocation... resolutely struggling forward" are on one side of the argument; criticism of the "faith in mechanism" on the other. The former argument now commonly neglects the criticism, while the latter, as commonly, has purged itself of strength and hope. The idea of balance is not usually one which suggests itself when we are thinking of Carlyle; but there is genuine balance in this essay, as well as fine, and now rare, unity of insight and determination.' See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 75-6.

²⁰⁰ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, pp. 72-3.

²⁰¹ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 72.

²⁰² Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 73.

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- ²⁰³ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 73.
- ²⁰⁴ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 58.
- ²⁰⁵ See Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics', *Edinburgh Review*, 54 (1831), 351-83.
- ²⁰⁶ Quoted in Maertz, 'Carlyle's Mediation of Goethe', p. 61.
- ²⁰⁷ Quoted in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 819.
- ²⁰⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 809.
- ²⁰⁹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 820.
- ²¹⁰ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 832.
- ²¹¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 832.
- ²¹² Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, p. 118.

Chapter Six

Plebeian Intellectual Praxis in the British Public Sphere: Locating an Early Nineteenth-Century Radical Materialist Cultural Criticism

The cultural politics of the early nineteenth century plebeian public sphere depended on a notion of intellectual praxis radically distinct from its bourgeois counterpart. For the three dominant radical plebeian intellectuals of the period—Thomas Spence, T.J. Wooler and William Cobbett—the idea of a cultural practice unrelated to immediate political or material aims was anathema. ‘Culture’ became for these intellectuals a materialist concept irrevocably wedded to the collective liberation of their critical constituency in the wider plebeian public sphere; both a ‘whole way of life’ as well as a means to a better one. In this explicitly materialist conception of cultural politics these social critics were helping to establish a radical cultural tradition in Britain that would profoundly influence the liberatory aspirations embedded within subsequent collective cultural projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the Chartist and socialist organization of the Victorian period, the adult education movement of the early twentieth century, and the postwar development of academic cultural studies.

If, as Richard Johnson has proposed, the ‘radical press remains the obvious route of entry into popular educational practices and dilemmas’ of the period, then we can view the leading radical plebeian intellectuals as powerful ideological transmitters to their wider publics.¹ They play a pivotal role in the radical public sphere, ‘part mediation or expression of some popular feelings, and part a forming or “education” of them’, as Johnson has argued in his seminal essay “‘Really Useful Knowledge’”.² This crucial pedagogical function of the radical intellectual can also be seen as part of a larger programme of cultural politics aimed at utilizing the education of the radical public ‘as a political strategy or as a means of changing the world’.³ I will be attempting to illustrate

in this final chapter the ways in which the intellectual practice reflected in the writings of Spence, Wooler and Cobbett played a key part in the construction of a liberatory tradition of collective cultural praxis in Britain.

This tradition is what cultural historian Tom Steele has defined as the alternative project of British cultural studies in his important recent work, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies* (1997). In his genealogy of the discipline, Steele defines a tradition of popular cultural praxis that I want to suggest has its foundation in the intellectual activism and social criticism of the early nineteenth century plebeian public sphere.⁴ Searching for the roots of this unique tradition of working-class cultural practice, Steele asks: ‘How did it happen that by the beginning of the twentieth century working people in this country appeared not only to have established a decent and humane culture of their own, which denied the claims to moral superiority of the capitalist order, but also that they identified with some notion of “Englishness” which appeared to fuse elements of that same working-class culture with a common national identity?’⁵ In his response to this question he outlines the rudiments of a working-class cultural project of coordinated and collective action: ‘I want to suggest here that this [project] can only be understood if we see the “culture” of working people not simply as a set of attitudes and rituals laid down in some traditional past, but as a complex of purposive activities designed to improve their individual and collective lot in the face of a clearly understood oppression.’⁶ My aim here is to demonstrate that the models of intellectual resistance developed during the ideologically volatile first third of the nineteenth century in Britain bequeathed to later working-class cultural formations and intellectual projects an underlying ethical imperative grounded on a thoroughgoing materialist critique of society.

We first must come to terms with a coherent and functioning definition of the radical public which, being organized around these shared ideas of material and political liberation, served as the primary site of intellectual and cultural transmission in the plebeian public sphere. E.P. Thompson has perhaps best articulated the difficulties in discerning a

unified cultural and intellectual formation out of the volatile and often fragmented plurality of plebeian publics in the early nineteenth century:

We may say that there were several different ‘publics’ impinging upon and overlapping each other, but nevertheless organized according to different principles. Among the more important were the commercial public, pure and simple, which might be exploited at times of radical excitement (...) but which was followed according to the simple criteria of profitability; the various more-or-less organised publics, around the Churches or the Mechanic’s Institutes; the passive public which the improving societies sought to get at and redeem; and the active, Radical public, which organized itself in the face of the Six Acts and the taxes on knowledge.⁷

From this analysis of the totality of the popular audience in the early nineteenth century it is necessary to distinguish which public comes closest to the conception of a radical plebeian public sphere utilized in this chapter. The first audience, described as the ‘commercial public’, can be safely isolated as a precursor to the mass literary public that emerged with so much consequence in the later part of the century; truly the antithesis of the normative intellectual model outlined by Habermas. The second and third publics organized around the various improving societies and institutions of the middle-classes can be safely put to one side as well, as they functioned more as deliberate cultural surrogates for a frightened bourgeoisie (detailed in the last chapter with reference to the ideological origins of the SDUK), than as independent, self-legitimizing institutions in their own right. Indeed, as David Lloyd and Paul Thomas have observed, institutions like the Mechanics’ Institutes attempted to devise an ‘education which is *by* the gentleman and *for* the worker’ and a cultural space in which ‘the appearance of autonomy on the part of the learner subjected to the “positional superiority” of the pedagogue is preserved by the shared performance of a mutual project’.⁸ So it is on the last of the popular publics, described by Thompson as ‘the active, Radical public’, that we need to focus our attention.

The best recent conceptualization of this plebeian public has been undertaken by the literary historian Kevin Gilmartin. In a preliminary account of the cultural politics of early nineteenth-century intellectual radicalism, ‘Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere’, which he would further develop in his full-length study, *Print Politics: The Press and*

Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England (1996), Gilmartin argues that the ideological polarization of the British public sphere during the period contributed to a distinctive and all embracing cultural politics of ‘counter-publicity’. Influenced by Nancy Fraser’s idea of the ‘subaltern counterpublic’, Gilmartin maps a specific project of intellectual opposition in the plebeian public sphere: ‘Notions of counter-publics and counter-publicity help account for the oppositional imperative behind a reform movement that undertook above all else to write, speak, organize and act *against* dominant institutions and practices.’⁹ The ‘radical plebeian counterpublic sphere’, as Gilmartin puts it, was thus a dedicated vehicle for the political and cultural liberation of its audience.¹⁰ This explicitly counter-hegemonic cultural and intellectual space articulated the utopian aspirations of its nascent public with a trove of metaphors and a constant stream of ironic, mocking imagery in its attempt to confront the developing cultural and state institutions of early nineteenth-century capitalism.

In addition to this ‘symbolic’ cultural function, the plebeian public sphere also provided its readers with a valuable physical space in which to organize political resistance to these ideologically integrating institutions. As Gilmartin stresses, this dual function underlined its distinctive cultural identity: ‘The popular radical public sphere of the early nineteenth century was, then, both representation and practice, both an elusive phantom *and* a material body; political protest was articulated through a rich assortment of languages and strategies, texts and institutions, innovations and traditions.’¹¹ As we can see from Gilmartin’s conception of the plebeian public sphere, the indissoluble link between symbolic intellectual representation and direct political praxis helped to define a model for cultural action clearly distinguished from its bourgeois counterpart.

The way in which this popular audience was constructed in the plebeian public sphere also helps to differentiate its cultural practice from that of the bourgeois public sphere. In contrast to the isolation of the bourgeois reader in the early nineteenth century, the collective reading practices of the plebeian public sphere drew upon an altogether

different conception of intellectual subjectivity. As Jon Klancher has observed, a unique subjectivity was constructed by radical intellectuals confronting ‘their readers as collectives and representatives of collectives—“an *inseparable* part” of the social order, undetachable members of an audience contesting its position in social and cultural space’.¹² This form of subjectivity, far from individuating its readership, attempted to ‘bind one reader to another *as audience*’ in a process in which the radical critic ‘confronted and spoke for’ this audience ‘in a complex rhetorical act of “representation”’.¹³ I would add to Klancher’s description here that this act of representation was also an intrinsically dialectical cultural process in which the radical audience actively shaped the polemical messages of the critic. Perhaps the greatest exemplar of this dialectical intellectual practice was William Cobbett. Cobbett’s relationship with his audience has been characterized by E.P. Thompson as ‘peculiarly intimate’, and this intimacy was part of larger dialectic in which ‘Cobbett’s ideas can be seen less as a one-way propagandist flow than as the incandescence of an alternating current, between his readers and himself’.¹⁴ It is in this sense that the collective and popularly constituted cultural space of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere served as a model for subsequent projects of radical cultural praxis in Britain, including the socialist reading circles of the Victorian period and the later pedagogical innovations of the Adult Education movement.¹⁵

The most dominant print vehicle in the plebeian public sphere, the radical weekly, was disseminated in environments that encouraged an interactive and inclusive communicative dynamic, one that even brought the illiterate and semi-literate into its unique form of cultural community. Gilmartin argues that the radical weekly was an extension of the interaction between orality and print, making up ‘a mixed environment of popular communication which included important... bridges between print and speech, public and private, individual and community’.¹⁶ This was a cultural lifeworld of shared subscriptions in which ‘the news was read aloud at political meetings and taverns, providing a non-literate public with access to the expanding culture of print, and extending the circulation of

periodicals well beyond the number of copies printed'.¹⁷ This collective context also influenced the stylistics of social criticism in the plebeian public sphere. As Gilmartin observes, the oral dimension of this new popular culture created out of the radical taverns and political clubs carried over into the uniquely demotic and personalized prose style of radical plebeian criticism: 'Even the personal tone and vernacular rhythms of a radical prose style can be seen as an effort to narrow the gap between the printed word and its popular reception.'¹⁸ It might be added that this new form of cultural praxis in the plebeian public sphere also narrowed the gap between intellectual expression and collective political action in ways that were both incomprehensible and terrifying to a contemporaneously developing middle-class intellectual public.

Speaking more generically, the typical essay in the plebeian public sphere also drew on unique linguistic devices that helped solidify the 'connection between individual experience and broader social and political developments'.¹⁹ In opposition to the increasingly meditative tone of bourgeois cultural criticism in the 1820s—a tone redolent of an idealist moral despair bred in the physical isolation of the bourgeois study—contemporary plebeian criticism, in both its mode and target of address, often mimicked the directly political form of the manifesto. In the alternating affirmative and accusatory critical voice emerging out of the prose of Spence, Cobbett, and Wooler a potentially liberatory cultural space was being created for its audience in the wider public sphere; one that has its linguistic roots in the moral invocations of the manifesto. As Janet Lyon has pointed out, the collective pronoun 'we' of the manifesto form creates a 'new generic space in the arena of public discourse' that 'aspires to a concrete form of cultural work'.²⁰ This unique form also encourages the kind of oppositional yet affirmative solidarity that Gilmartin sees as the *sine qua non* of early nineteenth century counter-publicity. Lyon explains this polarizing dynamic encouraged by the form thus:

The potential audience of this contractual 'we' occupies the position of either supporting or rejecting the manifesto as a representative text. That part of the potential audience withholding support ceases to be hailed in the 'we' of an audience, and in effect takes up the position of the antagonistic 'you' against

whom the manifesto charges are pressed. The part of the potential audience that assents becomes the 'true' audience and forms an affective identification with the manifesto's 'we'.²¹

In a period of British cultural history after the French Revolution when public radical intellectual affiliation often carried with it very direct threats to personal liberty from a repressive state apparatus of spies, justices of the peace, and court officers, this strategic linguistic gesture could generate powerful feelings of empathy in the radical plebeian audience. This collective intellectual subjectivity encouraged an oppositional cultural politics grounded in the shared bitter experiences of legal persecution, economic disenfranchisement and political marginalization. In a similar manner, the radical plebeian audience also shared an affirmative vision of political and social transformation with their intellectual mediators in the press.

In this way, plebeian intellectual subjectivity was much more defined by the triadic matrix identified by Roger Chartier of production, reception and presentation, discussed at the opening of part two, than its bourgeois counterpart. The production of social criticism by the three intellectuals discussed in this chapter was interactive in the sense that the structure and tone of their writings both anticipated, and was thus dictated by, their wider reception in the radical public sphere. To a much greater extent than bourgeois critical discourse, the ideological trajectory of plebeian social criticism during this time was tied to the fate of the larger collective project of radical dissidence—which in Spence's case pointed back to the radical utopianism of the Jacobin period, and in the instances of Wooler and Cobbett's writing looked ahead to the new materialist expression of postwar Radicalism. The radical plebeian intellectual provided a unique form of cultural leadership for his readers assembled in the reform clubs, radical taverns and weaver's workshops that formed the core sites of transmission in the plebeian public sphere. If Cobbett sometimes distrusted the volatile independence of such places as the Hampden Clubs, he still attempted to create a similarly politicized space for the completion of his critical project. For unlike the privatized, emotionally detached, and politically restrictive subjectivity

reflected in the cultural criticism of the post-Scottish Enlightenment public sphere—an intellectual positionality that led in Carlyle’s case to the displacement of a wider reformist politics in a renewed cultivation of the self, or, for Jeffrey and Brougham, encouraged an ideological complicity with the limited reformism of the 1832 Bill—the endpoint of critical discourse in the plebeian public sphere could only be reached through the reader’s commitment to wider economic and social transformation in the material present.

The Outlines of Radical Plebeian Ideology in the Early Nineteenth Century

Before proceeding with the specific readings themselves, it may be helpful to map out the oppositional ideology that animated radical plebeian cultural criticism. Again, it is to E.P. Thompson that we turn for a lucid explanation of popular radical ideology in this period. In his chapter ‘Patricians and Plebs’, from the 1991 study *Customs in Common*, Thompson revised his influential thesis about plebeian cultural continuities first articulated in two landmark essays from the 1970s: ‘Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture’, and ‘Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?’.²²

In this chapter Thompson proposes that ‘there might be a radical disassociation—and at times antagonism—between the culture and even the “politics” of the poor and those of the great’.²³ The sharply divergent cultural politics between the classes Thompson theorizes as a ‘dialectics of culture’. This was a process where counter-hegemonic cultural formations coalesced around a symbolically articulated ‘popular’ interest in opposition to that of the ruling classes.²⁴ My argument from chapter four on the developing radical cultural tradition from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century broadly follows this historical trajectory outlined by Thompson. However, I choose to emphasize the more inchoate phenomenon of the Wilkite crowd as the key intermediate stage in the development of the plebeian public sphere, between a constitutionalist Revolutionary intellectual formation in the mid-seventeenth century, and the ‘directed reading’ practices of the Jacobin public sphere at the end of the eighteenth century.

Thompson argues that in the eighteenth century this cultural dialectic created ‘a customary popular culture, nurtured by experiences quite distinct from those of the polite culture, conveyed by oral traditions, reproduced by example (perhaps, as the century goes on, increasingly by literate means), expressed by symbolism and in ritual, and at a very great distance from the culture of England’s rulers’.²⁵ Subtly revising his thesis from *The Making of the English Working Class* to emphasize the counter-hegemonic quality of symbolic cultural practices in the eighteenth century, Thompson adds that this antagonistic framework must be the starting point for any properly grounded analysis of the cultural and intellectual history of plebeian radicalism in Britain: ‘But one cannot understand this culture, in its experiential ground, in its resistance to religious homily, in its picaresque flouting of the provident bourgeois virtues, in its ready recourse to disorder, and in its ironic attitudes towards the law, unless one employs the concept of the dialectical antagonisms, adjustments, and (sometimes) reconciliations of class.’²⁶ I would add that this ‘symbolic cultural conflict’ played out in the differing cultural practices of the elite and popular classes of the eighteenth century was materialized in print form in the divergent intellectual practices and critical discourses of the plebeian and bourgeois public spheres in the early nineteenth century.

Another aspect of plebeian ideology that stands out in a comparative examination of intellectual and cultural practices in the early nineteenth century is its surprising coherence in the face of the hegemonic economic, social and moral imperatives of liberal capitalism. Craig Calhoun has expressed this complex ideological formation as ‘reactionary radicalism’ — a manifestation of intellectual and cultural populism that used both the idea and social basis of traditional community ‘for radical collective action’.²⁷ Calhoun elaborates on this concept:

This populism was radical; it rejected the very foundations on which capitalist society was being built in England. At the same time, however, the movements of early nineteenth-century workers were reactions to disruptions in a traditional way of life, a resistance to new pressures working against the realization of old aspirations... Their radicalism was intrinsically connected to their particular situations in the midst of social and economic transition.²⁸

I would add that this shared vision of collective action also provided a common moral basis for the cultural agency realized by readers, listeners and intellectuals in the wider plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century (and often across profound differences of geography, particular political traditions and respective levels of intellectual development). Calhoun convincingly argues that the common vision of ‘a stable and good traditional England’ united traditionalists and Jacobins in their opposition to the colonizing cultural forces of early industrial capitalism. According to Calhoun: ‘...the popular appeal of traditionalism and Jacobinism had the same foundation. Traditionalists and Jacobins touched a responsive chord among workers because of the concrete aspirations of the latter in and for their local communities were set on a similar foundations of “rights”.’²⁹

Developing Calhoun’s thesis, I would argue that the plebeian public sphere was the principal forum for this new ideological synthesis between a customary anti-commercial communitarianism and a more avant-garde Jacobin radicalism. As Calhoun maintains: ‘Reading Jacobin literature and listening to oral traditions through the filters of their own attachments to communities and trade groups, these people created a new and important position in the firmament of political ideologies.’³⁰

Calhoun’s analysis of early nineteenth century plebeian ideology diverges from Thompson’s in *The Making of the English Working Class* in one important respect. Against Thompson, Calhoun argues that the primary carriers of this ‘reactionary radical’ ideology—those artisans³¹, skilled craftsmen and workmen who made up the most active segment of the audience—were not precursors to a unified working-class movement, but instead constituted a unique cultural formation and political episode in the history of popular radicalism in Britain: ‘As a distinct force in British politics and as bearers of a distinct ideology, they were important only in the first third of the nineteenth century. They stand temporally between the Jacobins and the “modern working class” as a part of the history of popular opposition in Britain.’³² This is why a study of the cultural praxis of the

plebeian public sphere in the early nineteenth century can help to constructively complicate the history of popular anti-capitalist movements in Britain. During this formative period in the development of industrial capitalism, 'Values and analyses with long histories achieved clarity of expression'.³³ Indeed, the new forms of intellectual and cultural resistance offered in the plebeian public sphere 'provided a definition of the terms of action to which workers and others could later refer'.³⁴ Calhoun suggests that the dissemination of this radical ideology in the plebeian public sphere created new forms of cultural empowerment: '... the ideology had an existence in the minds of artisans, outworkers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, journalists, and what we might now call "intellectuals." It was the product and the property of a distinct and disenfranchised population. In their minds and in certain critical writings, it could be held on to for later application.'³⁵ This was the ideological foundation that underpinned the plebeian cultural criticism of Spence, Wooler and Cobbett analyzed below.

Perhaps we can return to Kevin Gilmartin's conception of a plebeian 'counterpublic sphere' as a way to clarify issues of ideology, culture and intellectual practice that will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter. Gilmartin argues in *Print Politics* that 'the radical movement exercised the deliberative as well as the critical function of a political public sphere'.³⁶ This suggests the ways in which the radical movement engaged in its own process of differentiation with other publics over control of the very basis of intellectual protest. Gilmartin writes: 'The radical press was from the outset saturated with distinctions among publics, peoples, and opinions, as it struggled with its enemies over control of these empowering terms.'³⁷ This struggle over the material tools of intellectual protest helped define the movement's underlying didacticism; it perceived itself to be first and foremost an instrument of ideological instruction to a nascent political public unjustly excluded from the more formal institutions of power. The result of this cultural process 'was a limited and provisional version of the fourth estate, compatible with the movement's remedial self-image: the oppositional press could provide a transitional instrument through

which the people reclaimed the authority in the House of Commons denied them by corruption'.³⁸

This surrogate model of civil society constructed by publicists like Spence, Cobbett, and Wooler in the plebeian counterpublic sphere helped define the extra-textual nature of radical discourse. The many speeches and debates included in the leading radical weeklies encouraged collective processes of dissemination and militated against the 'privatized' intellectual subjectivity of the ideologically hegemonic bourgeois liberal public sphere. As part of its necessary engagement with a corrupt system of totalitarian proportions, Gilmartin argues that the plebeian counterpublic sphere developed a 'radical countersystem' that 'sought to appropriate and mock the authority of a system that was not easily transcended or superseded'.³⁹ Such a strategy necessitated a flexible deployment of political language; one that seldom achieved the ideological clarity of later radical movements but instead reflected—and even sought to highlight—the vicissitudes of cultural production in a deeply unstable and openly repressive intellectual environment. As Gilmartin puts it, 'A dialectically engaged radical opposition was keen to trace its own contradictions to the internal contradictions of a corrupt system.'⁴⁰ What makes Gilmartin's conception of the plebeian counterpublic sphere so refreshing from the point of view of social theory in particular, and radical cultural historiography generally, is that this 'negative engagement with corruption' that coloured all aspects of radical intellectual practice, ultimately functions beyond a merely negative role and can also serve as a normative theory of radical publicity in and of itself.⁴¹

As in the previous chapter with the leading social critics of the *Edinburgh Review*, I will attempt to 'map' the intellectual positionality of Spence, Cobbett and Wooler in their separate critical responses to the corrupted political institutions of early nineteenth-century capitalism. However, because of the lack of a distinctive institutional experience uniting all three men in the plebeian public sphere, this mapping will have to proceed discretely, with

a series of short introductions laying out the specific cultural context of each critical intervention.

The Cultural Contexts of Radical Reception: The Spencean Underground

The 1803 publication of *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence for a political pamphlet entitled The Restorer of Society to its Natural State, on May 27th, 1801, at Westminster Hall, before Lord Kenyon and a special jury* was received into an institutional context that the cultural historian Iain McCalman has labeled the ‘Spencean-Jacobin underground’.⁴²

This was a transitional cultural space between the old Jacobin public sphere of the London Corresponding Society and the emerging periodical-based plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century. McCalman describes the atmosphere of the tavern ‘free-and-easy’, or convivial debating club, as ‘a feature of the Jacobin movement’ which ‘between 1798 and 1803 became its dominant form’.⁴³ It was an inherently unstable—yet for that also inclusive—cultural space where social hierarchies in the outside world were bracketed during the fluid time of ‘radical sociability’ in the taverns where members of the ‘Spensonian’ society (distinct from the posthumous ‘Society of Spencean Philanthropists’) gathered. These alehouse convivial clubs proved to be ideally suited to the semi-covert organizational activities of the Spencean underground. In this embryonic form of the early nineteenth-century plebeian public sphere, the outlines of a genuinely popular political counter-culture developed: ‘Members of the circle composed, sang and printed Spencean songs to the tune of popular folk ballads. They also debated Spence’s land plan and other topics at tavern meetings...; they infuriated local and Home Office officials with wall chalkings; and they circulated tracts, broadsheets, posters, poems and metal tokens advertising Spence’s plan.’⁴⁴

This cultural space brought together motifs from the three historical stages of English intellectual radicalism outlined in chapter four. The impromptu political discussions of the Leveller taverns from the early modern period were recreated in the radical sociability of the tavern ‘free and easies’. The creative use of forms of radical

iconography and popular media developed during the Wilkite period of the mid-eighteenth century were also utilized by the Spencean radical circle where chalkings, handbills, and tokens distributed on the streets of London helped spread the political message contained in texts like *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* (1801). Finally, the organizational urgency of the Jacobin public sphere of the 1790s—where political discourse took on the moral immediacy of an anticipated revolutionary transformation—was translated in the early nineteenth century into a new kind of intellectual vanguardism at Spencean radical gatherings in alehouses all over London.

The revised 1803 text of *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* was disseminated within a complex cultural landscape circumscribed, yet never completely defined, by its official legal status. David Worrall, in his study *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (1992), has provided the most important recent cultural historical reading of the events surrounding the 1801 sedition trial of Spence; events which I suggest constituted both the literary backdrop to, and wider social context of, the utopian political vision articulated in the text. Indeed, I agree wholly with Worrall's contention that the trial stands as a representative episode of intellectual radicalism at the beginning of both the nineteenth century proper and, perhaps more relevant to the argument of this chapter, of the embryonic cultural politics of the plebeian public sphere: 'Spence's quite well documented trial can stand in for the resistive politics of a great many radicals of his kind but even on its own, Spence's sedition trial became significant enough in later years for it to become part of the cultural history of his age.'⁴⁵

Spence was convicted for writing in *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* the following words: 'People only have to say "Let the Land be ours," and it will be so'.⁴⁶ Like all radical discourse of the period, this call to action can only be properly understood when returned to its communicative origins in the plebeian public sphere where the line separating the written word and speech was constantly being blurred. This situation was in part due to the conditions of discourse during the period. As David Worrall has observed,

sedition 'was the dominant law of discourse in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century England: it suppressed writing and it suppressed speech'.⁴⁷ Because of the complex instruments of repression at the government's disposal during this period—which included a vast network of spies, loyalist associations, and informants—radicals often relied on alternative methods of communication. Worrall explains: 'Artisan radicals developed their own strategies for circumventing the regulation of discourse, registering their political autonomy through the autonomy of speech. Speech was more immediate than writing, less prone to indictment... Speech was also more suited to the outlawed strategies of the physical force ideology popular amongst some radicals.'⁴⁸ Indeed, this reliance on speech was perhaps more the case with Spence than with other radicals. His marginal status as a radical intellectual without the platform of a periodical only made his engagement with his audience more necessarily direct and immediate; whether in a tavern 'free and easy', side street, or from the defendant's dock in a courtroom. In his seditious call for readers and listeners to act upon the power of their collective voice and seize the land, Spence was engaging in an effort of direct agitation rather than mere literary exclamation. This dialogical structure was a defining feature of radical plebeian discourse at the time, where, as Worrall has observed, every 'utterance is already fully constituted elsewhere within the culture of its specific language system: there are no soliloquies.'⁴⁹ In both the opening of the text, in which Spence conducts a dialogue with a skeptical interrogator, and in the body where he lays out the details of his social vision in a series of letters, an active audience response is assumed.

The Restorer of Society to its Natural State was essentially another restatement of the 'Plan' to nationalize all lands in local, decentralized units first mooted twenty-five years earlier in his 1775 lecture to the Newcastle Philosophical Society, later published in 1793 as *The Real Rights of Man*.⁵⁰ As the economic historian Noel Thompson has argued, Spence's plan was an attempt to materialize the social and political rights first articulated in Paine's *Rights of Man*: 'Paine might discourse on "the rights of man", but those rights

lacked substance unless underpinned by a system of landholding that invested individuals with the power to make them effective. It was that, and not the form of government, which would determine the freedoms that could be enjoyed and the rights that could be exercised... Throughout his political economy Spence stressed the primacy of economic over political power.’⁵¹ Spence’s plan was thus the most considered attack to date on the material inequalities institutionalized in the British legal and political systems of the eighteenth century.

Initiating an intellectual style that would be taken up by Wooler and Cobbett after him, Spence begins the text self-referentially, with an apologetic ‘Motto’ declaring the necessary role of the radical political intellectual. He writes: ‘The bold political Innovator is probably as necessary a Character as any other for the improvement of the World. He leads us beyond the bounds of Habit and Custom a necessary step to future Advances; and though he may sometimes lead us wrong it is better perhaps to go wrong sometimes than stand still too long.’⁵² In a public sphere inhabited by liberal and reactionary discourses either defending the status-quo of the British constitution against Jacobin incursions, or proposing only modest revisions, Spence’s apology here stands as a revealing defence of revolutionary intellectual praxis at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Later in his preface, itself a detailed response to conservative criticisms of his land reform plan, Spence defends his intellectual project as an amplification of the excluded voices of the poor, who he felt were both socially and culturally disenfranchised by the contemporary arrangements of agrarian capitalism. Responding specifically to the defence of the propertied classes from his mock interrogator, Spence declares: ‘There is a feeling Advocate for the Rich! But let us try if we can plead as feelingly for the Poor.’⁵³ Spence acknowledges the enormous ideological challenges facing his counter-hegemonic effort on behalf of the poor, asking his readers and listeners—as much as himself—‘what signifies attempting to specify the numberless Modes in which they treat us with Injury and Contempt’.⁵⁴ His reply is a surprisingly sober admission of the relative ideological impotence of radical discourse in

the wider public sphere: 'It is impossible. For on our part it is all suffering and on theirs all Insult and Oppression.'⁵⁵

In this preface Spence attempts to uncover the poverty produced by the current property system and the natural injustice of the contemporary social and material arrangements in Britain. He writes: 'Pray how many have we among the Poor that though they have laboured hard all their Lives and Contributed as much as they could to Enrich and Embellish the World with their useful Works and now in the Decline of Life without Health, Strength or Ability to Endure "Hardness", and have neither Money nor Land, and by no fault of their own too, and yet Nobody pities them?'⁵⁶ Recalling arguments put forward by natural justice theorists going back to the agrarian utopianism of the Diggers, Spence contends that the current system is a betrayal of an older moral contract, and claims that the land 'is ours in Justice, even though we were Brutes, because it is our common Pasture and hunting Park'.⁵⁷

This appeal to a pre-capitalist social morality would have a powerful resonance amongst his radical audience, themselves first-hand witnesses to an attempt by agricultural and industrial capital to eradicate any last vestige of 'the old self-imposed disciplines of peasant-craft society', which, as the Marxist social historian John Foster has observed, were 'both disintegrating and still dangerously potent' in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁸ In Biblical terms Spence decries the new moral consensus of capitalist society where 'Venality and the Cursed Spirit of Traffic pervades Everything'.⁵⁹ He continues: 'For a Monied Man may even buy himself into Church or State, or the Legislature. So it is no wonder they so earnestly plead for open and unlimited Traffic in our Lands, Provisions, and like great Babylon Even in Slaves and the Souls of Men.'⁶⁰ Articulating a defence of what E.P. Thompson has called the 'moral economy' of pre-industrial England, Spence argues that 'many things are too sacred and of too great importance to the Happiness and Dignity of the Human Race to be trafficked in'.⁶¹ He thus initiates the first radical materialist critique of early nineteenth-century capitalist society, with his own plan an effort 'to put a stop to all

illicit Trade', beginning 'with prohibiting all Commerce in Land, for that is the Root of all the other Branches of injurious Trade'.⁶² This focus on land ownership and land-use issues at the heart of Spence's materialist critique was entirely relevant in an economy where the lion's share of wealth was still tied in one way or another to the land. As Noel Thompson has observed, 'Spence's whole stress on land ownership as holding the key to social transformation was legitimate given the context in which he wrote'.⁶³

But the vision of agrarian radicalism Spence lays out in *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* also reveals an awareness of the multiple ways in which the workings of 'surplus value' —that foundational axiom of modern capitalist economics— was destroying much of the pre-capitalist cultural lifeworld that both sustained and provided the normative vision for much plebeian cultural critique. In an extended passage at the end of his preface, Spence invokes a Biblical narrative to frame the timeless social rituals of plebeian culture being wiped out by the new capitalism:

O Moses! what a generous plan didst thou form! Thou wast not afraid of thy lower Classes turning Drones by good usage. Thou indulgently ordainest Holidays and Times of Rejoicing out of number. New Moons, and Sabbaths, and Jubilees, Feasts of Trumpets, Feasts of Tabernacles, etc., and liberal Sacrifices which were Feasts of Hospitality and Love, where the Priest and the Stranger and the Proprietor all sat down to eat and regale together. Neither was thou churlishly afraid of thy People tasting cheering beverage; for thou generously ordered them it at a distance from the place of worship to turn the usual offerings in Kind into Money, and take it up with them and there spend it in strong Drink, or whatsoever their soul lusted after.⁶⁴

The spaces of radical sociability in the Spencean underground are equated with those of religious sponsored holidays in this passage. This Biblical allusion has a double function for Spence in this text, with different meanings for his separate constituencies in the wider public sphere. Firstly, he shrewdly uses these specific religious references as a rhetorical device to familiarize the rituals of a tavern underground culture for his middle-class public of law clerks, apothecaries, surgeons, shopkeepers and military officers, all of whom, though potential intellectual sympathizers to Spencean social critique, still held this world in great suspicion.⁶⁵ As Iain McCalman has pointed out, Spence's intellectual subjectivity

placed him 'at the meridian of the overlapping social categories of degraded artisan, failed shopkeeper and marginal professional'.⁶⁶ Secondly, his description of religiously sanctioned social ritual also serves to ironically highlight some of the morally transgressive expressions of cultural praxis in the Spencean underground like heavy group drinking and radical toasting; sexual libertinism and the dissemination of bawdy and obscene prints; and the singing of seditious contemporary ballads.⁶⁷

In the cultural lifeworld of the Spencean underground these practices stood as symbolic public acts of rebuke to the new ethic of puritanical morality promoted by the contemporary social institutions of industrial capitalism.⁶⁸ Spence associates the 'respectable' social morality of an unfeeling capitalist elite with the wider social inequalities produced by their ideology of possessive individualism:

But we, God help us! have fallen under the power of the hardest set of Masters that ever existed. After swallowing up every species of common property and what belonged to religious societies and townships, they now begrudge us Every Comfort of life. Everything almost is reckoned an unbecoming luxury to such scum of the earth, to such a Swinish multitude. They are always preaching up temperance, labour, patience and submission, and that Education only tends to render us unhappy, by refining our feelings, exalting our ideas, and spoiling us for our low Avocations.⁶⁹

Popular leisure practices are defended here as an integral part of the larger lifeworld of cultural resistance. This attack by Spence on the foundations of bourgeois morality would re-appear later in the period as a key critique of the inhumanity of early nineteenth-century capitalism, finding prime targets in the moral paternalism of the SDUK, the 'cheap repository tracts' of Hannah More, and the Mechanics' Institutes, amongst many others. Here, however, Spence is keen to emphasize the connection between the non-capitalist values promoted by popular leisure rituals and the individual moral benefits of education; a link seemingly severed in the various schemes promoted by the bourgeois reformers.

The rest of the text is divided into a series of letters addressed to an imaginary citizen 'concerning the means of improving the happiness of mankind'.⁷⁰ This epistolary structure would become a common feature of plebeian periodical criticism, emulated by

Cobbett in his famous ‘Paper Against Gold’ series written from gaol in 1810-11 (discussed below). The letter form, unlike the highly discursive review essay pioneered in the *Edinburgh Review*, emphasizes the contested positionality of the radical writer in direct engagement with contemporary political events familiar to his popular audience. He becomes both correspondent and surrogate to his wider readership in the plebeian public sphere. In *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State*, each letter focuses on a specific aspect of contemporary society—from the corrosive legacy of feudal land ownership to the moral hypocrisy reflected in the laws governing marriage—and the manner in which his revolutionary Plan could improve it. The direct style of address in these letters is another distinctive feature of plebeian communicative praxis, where simple, clear and focused methods of writing were privileged for their pedagogical immediacy, as well as their ease of translation into the more orally-centred intellectual world of the radical gathering. Indeed, the fact that these letters were read aloud in open court by Spence only adds to their identity as unique ‘spoken texts’.

In the first letter Spence ends with a mock ‘Indictment’ of the current system of private property, shrewdly prefacing it with a compressed history of the Fall of Man and the perpetuation of Original Sin in contemporary society. His Indictment links an explicitly materialist critique of capitalist social relations with an implicit call for a new mode of collective self-government. Its intent, like much writing in the radical plebeian public sphere, is essentially one of demystification. Spence writes: ‘Now Citizen, if we really want to get rid of these Evils from amongst Men, we must destroy not only personal and hereditary Lordship, but the cause of them, which is Private Property in Land. For this is the Pillar that supports the Temple of Aristocracy. Take away this Pillar, and the whole Fabric of their Dominion falls to the ground.’⁷¹ Spence implores his audience to seek out the connection between property and political privilege, reminding them that ‘at present it is those who have robbed us of our lands, that have robbed us also of the privilege of making our own Laws...’⁷² Ever the schoolmaster, he leaves his readers (and listeners) with a

final reminder of their contemporary plight, adding 'let us bear this always in mind, and we shall never be at a loss to know where the root of the Evil lies'.⁷³

In his fifth and most important letter, Spence outlines the cultural conditions necessary for the dramatic social transformation envisioned in his Plan. This agenda for revolutionary praxis also contains the passage cited for seditious libel in the original trial proceedings. Spence begins the letter by criticizing the reformist argument for change. Specifying the evils of the system of landed property and the 'Landed Legislators' that control it, he argues 'anything short of total Destruction of the power of these Samsons will not do'.⁷⁴ The coming revolution must be accomplished 'not by simple shaving which leaves the roots of their strength to grow again... we must scalp them or else they will soon recover and pull our Temple of Liberty about our Ears'.⁷⁵ This revolutionary approach to social transformation blends a fundamentalist Jacobin political sensibility with nonconformist Biblical prophecy. In its uncompromising radicalism it stands out as a representative product of the post-revolutionary plebeian public sphere of the early 1800s. Indeed, even the most politically radical of Cobbett and Wooler's writings, both later in the decade and in the postwar period, never went as far as to advocate outright revolution, no matter how passionate their denunciation of the prevailing political system.

In a significant passage later in the letter about the state of the 'public mind', Spence makes important connections between the role of intellectual praxis, radical publicity, and revolutionary political agency in the public sphere. He writes: 'For the public mind being suitably prepared by reading my little Tracts and conversing on the subject, a few Contingent Parishes have only to declare the land to be theirs and form a convention of Parochial Delegates. Other adjacent Parishes would immediately on being invited follow the example, and send also their Delegates and thus would a beautiful and powerful New Republic instantaneously arise in full vigour.'⁷⁶ This description of directed cultural praxis in the public sphere is more than simply an anticipation of revolutionary political change. Spence is also recounting the activities of the tavern 'free and easies' that made up the heart

of the nascent plebeian public sphere in the early 1800s. In a more Utopian vein, he implicitly argues that this kind of plebeian cultural activity has normative implications for the establishment of a future democratic socialist society, provided 'the public mind is duly prepared'.⁷⁷

Spence executes a scathing critique of the emerging capitalist bureaucracy of the nineteenth century in his ninth letter. In some fundamental ways it anticipates Cobbett's 'Old Corruption' thesis concerning the hegemony exerted by the new 'paper money aristocracy'. Writing in the autumn of 1800, Spence outlines four classes who will be 'thrown out of employ' after the adoption of his Constitution.⁷⁸ The classes are the following (in order of importance): (1) Landlords and Stockholders 'who subsist on Revenues extorted legally as they say, from the Rest of Mankind'; (2) Lawyers and Attorneys 'who subsist almost entirely by conveying Landed Property from one to another, and in Litigations about it'; (3) Gentlemen's Servants; (4) Soldiers and Sailors 'employed in War'.⁷⁹ In powerfully resonant language reflective of the growing demonology being constructed in the plebeian public sphere, Spence asserts that, after being liquidated of their property holdings, this first class is not worthy of public sympathy:

Are these pampered people, these Monopolisers of the Earth, these Stockholders, these Placemen and Pensioners, this tyrannical Crew under which we groan; to furnish Rents and Taxes, for whom we starve ourselves and families, and suffer the privation of every comfort that renders Life desirable: I say are these Locusts to be eternally held up to us as objects of Charity and Commiseration, though we so generously suffer them still to remain the Richest members of the Community, and adopt those people for Fellow-citizens, that reject us, nay that treat us as of a different species? For shame! Urge not another word in favour of such undeserving objects.⁸⁰

This passage displays how much Cobbett's own demonology of a 'stock-jobbing' elite found in such important articles as 'Perish Commerce!' and 'Paper Against Gold' (discussed below) was in fact the continuation of a radical discourse begun much earlier in the decade by Spence. Indeed, Spence's analysis of the new paper money system in the eleventh letter closely parallels Cobbett's anti-tax and anti-inflationary critique in the latter article series. Looking forward to the abolition of the new financial system, Spence writes:

‘For the taxes and the Paper Money, which now enhance the price of everything, ceasing all at once, the difference in value, would be found very great, and the Dealers would immediately enter into competition with each other striving who should first lower their Articles till everything found the lowest level’.⁸¹ These observations by Spence in *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* suggest that a coherent tradition of materialist cultural criticism in the plebeian public sphere can in fact be traced back much earlier than Cobbett’s article series in the *Political Register* beginning in 1807.⁸²

In the twelfth letter we see Spence ironically highlight his status as a radical intellectual in the plebeian public sphere. Speaking of his Plan, he writes: ‘But whether England be the first or last Country to adopt it, or whether it be adopted anywhere at all, does not rest with me. I am but an Individual, and it is now out of my power even to recall it again, and therefore must remain, whether I will or no, a mere Bystander, while it must stand or fall according to its own merit’.⁸³ This deliberate show of modesty on Spence’s part—that is, his self-declared identity as a ‘mere Bystander’—is belied by the fact that these words were uttered in open court during a trial of seditious libel, where the author is accused of inciting revolutionary insurrection. An important part of radical plebeian intellectual praxis was the use of the intellectual himself as a kind of ‘movable platform’ for counter-publicity of the kind pioneered by Spence here in the delivery of his text to the public. The fact that this platform was often prepared by the legal authorities themselves in the form of a public trial, or sometimes imprisonment, only adds to the sense of anti-establishment praxis undertaken by these intellectual leaders in the plebeian public sphere. Two masters of this kind of anti-establishment counter-publicity were Cobbett and Wooler, following a pattern first developed by Spence in his sedition trial of 1801. Indeed, attempts at censorship and repression by the state throughout the period served only to increase popular legitimation for these symbolic acts of intellectual opposition. As Kevin Gilmartin has observed, ‘Prosecution for seditious or blasphemous libel became an *imprimatur* of opposition, the official acknowledgment of a discursive challenge’.⁸⁴

In Spence's final letter the material suffering of the poor is invoked as moral justification for his revolutionary Plan. He begins by eloquently describing the pitiable conditions that a monopolistic system of private property—exacerbated by the stresses of a wartime economy—has wrought on the poor and working classes: 'When I contemplate the meagre and beggarly appearance of the working people at this deplorable period, and at the same time hear their deep and desperate exclamations, sighed forth from their broken hearts, I cannot help thinking but that we are on the eve of some very great commotion.'⁸⁵ For Spence, this state of affairs demands a revolutionary change in property relations and power more generally, and provides moral purpose to his wider intellectual project in the public sphere. He writes: 'This is the Time then for plans of various sorts to be ready, that the Nation may have it in their power to choose one that will prevent the like misfortunes in future, for it is a melancholy thing to see a people after being compelled to throw their Burdens off their backs till they are laid on again, for want of knowing better.'⁸⁶ He adds later: 'It is certainly full time that Mankind were come to a clear understanding about establishing their own happiness.'⁸⁷ The vehicle for the revolutionary transformation to come is to be the dissemination of radical ideas in the public sphere, or what Spence describes as 'the search of Truth' where the agents of social transformation 'read, compare, judge and determine' until they 'have happily found the plan' that 'will restore Society to its Natural State'.⁸⁸ Interestingly for an intellectual figure often associated with violent tactics, Spence concludes his text with an appeal to public reason as the most efficient means of ending the present crisis: 'The public opinion will soon become one on a plain interesting Truth if properly and diligently represented to them. Then in consequence of such laudable diligence we may soon expect to see the people arise as one man, and peaceably retake possession of their long lost Rights.'⁸⁹

The publication of *The Restorer of Society to its Natural State* in 1803 as *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence* marked the first episode of radical plebeian intellectual praxis in the British public sphere. Coming as it did at the endpoint of the old Jacobin

current of radicalism and at the beginning of a new project of Radical reform centred around the writings of Cobbett and Wooler, Spence's text reveals plebeian counter-publicity at a crucial transitional stage. If the specific Spencean formation of plebeian radicalism would reach its culmination during the Cato Street conspiracy some fifteen years later, the radical materialist cultural discourse it initiated would continue unabated right through to the Reform Bill agitations of 1832. Although a prototypical figure for intellectual praxis in the plebeian public sphere, Spence lacked the stabilizing institutional ballast of a major periodical from which to frame his cultural criticism over a longer period of time. This constraint limited his influence to the tightly-knit cells of 'ultra-radicals' dotted throughout London. The plebeian public sphere would have to wait for the ideological maturation of William Cobbett before it could claim a radical intellectual with a genuinely mass following.

William Cobbett and the Construction of the 'Popular Imaginary' in the Plebeian Public Sphere

Although it is the contention of this chapter that the first significant intellectual and cultural episode of the plebeian public sphere was the 1803 publication of *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, the 1802 founding of the *Political Register* must serve as the formal beginning of the plebeian public sphere as an institutional expression of the radical periodical press. However, at its founding the journal was an unlikely platform for the emergence of plebeian intellectual radicalism.

Firstly, the readership to which Cobbett first appealed was not the literate artisanate and semi-literate rural workers that would later form the social foundation for his polemical appeals in the *Political Register*. As he himself boasted, his target audience included everyone 'from the King downwards' and focused on those most 'capable of forming an opinion'.⁹⁰ Far from being an organ of any particular political movement, Cobbett intended his periodical to become a journal of record for parliamentary affairs and 'embrace every rational object of a news-paper, a magazine, and a review'.⁹¹ Printed by T.C. Hansard of

Peterborough Court, Fleet Street, the single numbers sold for ten pence with a yearly subscription costing £2.15s, a price which ‘must necessarily narrow the circulation’, as Cobbett himself observed some years later.⁹²

Secondly, in terms of the journal’s ideological make-up, the *Political Register* in 1802 was—despite Cobbett’s advertised declarations of editorial independence—one of the most vocal print formations of anti-Jacobinism in Britain. The periodical was a conduit for the reactionary views of William Windham and his ‘New Opposition’ anti-appeasement contemporaries, who were Cobbett’s chief patrons during the journal’s first years.⁹³ This grouping in parliament was part of the ‘country Tory’ political wing that criticized the excesses of the urban commercial classes of Whig England in its domestic agenda whilst standing for a bellicose, pro-war anti-Gallicanism in its foreign policy. In some senses the nostalgic Burkean conservatism of this Windhamite formation was never abandoned by Cobbett, at least in his domestic concerns. Indeed, even at the height of his most anti-commercial Radical discourse during the postwar period Cobbett remained at heart a cultural reactionary pining for a lost organic order in the English countryside. For a young anti-American Tory pamphleteer recently returned from post-revolutionary United States, these men of the ‘New Opposition’, who in Cobbett’s words were ‘distinguished for their wisdom and loyalty, for their unshaken attachment to ancient establishments and their unequivocal abhorrence of innovation’, must have seemed the perfect parliamentary allies in sharp contrast to the opportunism and duplicity of their opponents in the Pitt and Addington governments.⁹⁴

So how did Cobbett, the arch-conservative anti-Jacobin polemicist, become the most prolific exponent of plebeian intellectual radicalism of the early nineteenth century? Part of the answer lies in his remarkable powers of empathy with a rural working population reeling from the accumulated effects of wartime inflation, agricultural consolidation, and the emerging speculative financial system, rather comically compressed in Cobbett’s discourse as ‘THE THING’. In short, as circumstances became materially

worse for this vast and unacknowledged presence in England's hinterland, Cobbett rapidly abandoned his previous political conservatism to become a spokesman for the new class of downtrodden subjects produced by the commercial system. Indeed, it was this ideological volatility which so distressed Jeffrey in his 1807 *Edinburgh Review* attack on Cobbett (see discussion in previous chapter). This ability to both approximate, and give voice to, the fears of the ordinary, semi-literate, and marginalized, I refer to as Cobbett's 'popular imaginary' — borrowing from (and to some extent modifying) Patrick Joyce's use of the term in his revisionist study of democratic subjectivity in the Victorian period, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (1994).⁹⁵ In that study Joyce usefully employs the conceptual term of the 'democratic imaginary' to metaphorically mark 'the significance of the proto-political, imagined forms of power and the social order which were articulated by formal politics' during the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ I argue that Cobbett's discourse in the plebeian public sphere served similar ends, articulating in often incendiary language the collective fears, anxieties and desires of a pre-industrial popular culture in manifest social crisis.⁹⁷

Cobbett's developing critical style—outraged, demotic, and impatient—was uniquely suited to serve this emerging 'popular imaginary' in the early nineteenth century. As Klancher has noted, Cobbett's critical voice 'formed an intentionally ambiguous, "populist" stance whose characteristic style would appear both idiomatically personal and the very sign of an emerging social class'.⁹⁸ Through this voice Cobbett imagined an alternative cultural narrative for his audience in the plebeian public sphere; that of 'an agricultural society, industrious, virtuous and patriotic—an agrarian vision rooted in the imagination of his own past'.⁹⁹ This 'popular imaginary' Cobbett created and engaged with had an extremely disquieting affect on both the aristocratic and middle-class political consciousness during the period, which in the words of Klancher 'imagined assemblies of seditious readers gathered round the radicals' texts', of which Cobbett's 'Penny Trash'

editions of the *Register* were the most widely circulated, with a readership approaching 200,000.¹⁰⁰

Before addressing the diverse cultural topography of Cobbett's audience it may be helpful to outline some of the central political theme of his discourse. At the centre of Cobbett's social criticism was his analysis of the political economy of 'Old Corruption'. This notion of a fundamentally corrupt and corrupting elite was a perennial feature of English radical populism going back to the eighteenth-century discourse of the 'freeborn Englishman' used so effectively, and for different ends, by Wilkes in the 1760s, and Paine some thirty years later. In many respects this radical English political tradition found its truest expression in Paine's *Rights of Man*, where the whole edifice of hereditary privilege is picked apart, piece by piece, in an explicit effort to both reclaim and construct a radical constitutional heritage for the nation. At the root of this discourse was the overriding assumption that English freedoms were being undermined by an alien 'Norman Yoke' imposed after the Conquest of 1066. The implication is that a genuinely democratic Saxon constitutional order was betrayed by this military conquest, and with it the promise of a free Parliament with universal manhood suffrage.¹⁰¹ The thesis of 'Old Corruption', then, in its Paineite formulation, builds upon the defence of this ancient tradition of rights with a detailed critique of the complex and interrelated system of favours, bribes, sinecures, and propaganda of the economic and political elite. It was, in the words of E.P. Thompson, 'a theory of the State and class power, although in a confused, ambiguous manner'.¹⁰²

What Cobbett did was to wed this Paineite critique of a fundamentally corrupt polity to a broader indictment of the expanding bureaucracy of the wartime economy during the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century. In many respects the germ of both Cobbett's initial 'Old Corruption' thesis, and his later critique of the origins of the contemporary financial system, emerged from his first encounter with Paineite economic theory, in particular Paine's *Decline of the English System of Finance* (1796), in 1803. This was a powerful experience for Cobbett and his recalling of it some years later has all

the features of a religious conversion. Writing in 1811 from Newgate Prison as part of his remarkable letter series on the Bullion Report, 'Paper Against Gold', Cobbett declared of this intellectual epiphany:

Here I saw to the bottom at once. Here was no bubble, no mud to obstruct my view: the stream was clear and strong: I saw the whole matter in its true light, and neither pamphleteers and speechmakers were, after that, able to raise a momentary puzzle in my mind. Paine not only told me what would pass, but showed me, gave me convincing reasons, *why it must come to pass*; and he convinced me also, that it was my duty to endeavour to open the eyes of my countrymen to the truths which I myself had learnt from him; because his reasoning taught me, that, the longer those truths remained hidden from their view, the more fatal must be the consequences.¹⁰³

From this dramatic conversion to Paineite economic radicalism Cobbett gradually developed a coherent critique of the new 'money system' through a series of writings in the *Political Register*. Starting with his 'Pittiad' in 1803-4 on the social evils produced by the British war effort, to the 'Perish Commerce!' articles of 1807-8 attacking the corrupt roots of free trade, and culminating in the 'Paper Against Gold' series from 1810-11, Cobbett traced the evolution of a new economic order in the country. This new economic settlement had turned its back on the old customary relationships of the pre-industrial moral economy and was, as Noel Thompson observed, 'governed according to the principles of financial gain'.¹⁰⁴

At the pinnacle of the new capitalist pyramid in the early nineteenth century was a conglomeration of war profiteers, debt financiers, enclosing landowners, government placemen, and 'stock jobbers' (stockbrokers), who together facilitated a redistribution of wealth from the traditional agricultural sector in the countryside to a parasitic new financial elite in London—a city mythologized as the 'Great Wen' in Cobbettian polemical discourse. As the conservative economic historian W.D. Rubenstein suggests in *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain* (1993), this new ruling class is perhaps best seen as a new *economic* formation working in correspondence with an older political elite: 'In economic terms the pre-1832 elite was based in a close and harmonious connection between mercantile wealth, especially that based in the old Empire, City finance, land, the

professions, and the government as contractor, loan-agent, and originator of “Old Corruption”, the extraordinary system of lucrative perquisites which came to fortunate aristocrats, government employees, and their relatives.’¹⁰⁵ ‘Old Corruption’ was a populist discourse struggling to come to terms with the complex totality of the new capitalist hegemony, by necessity fusing together older symbols of political corruption with the newer abstractions of liberal political economy. It was a cultural hybrid constructed in the plebeian public sphere where ‘Power used commercial hands but wore an aristocratic face’, as Jon Klancher has put it.¹⁰⁶ Cobbett’s discourse of ‘Old Corruption’ evolved from its origins as a moral critique of the corrupt machinery of the British state into a powerful indictment of the social injustice produced by financial capitalism. The discourse did have obvious strategic limitations, most particularly its belief that the social inequalities of the new capitalist settlement could be ameliorated through a dedicated project of radical political reform. However, this strategic flaw should not overshadow its practical value as a deeply felt popular language of cultural critique.

Cobbett’s recurrent invocations of ‘Old Corruption’ attempted to usefully compress a complex ideological system that ‘threatened to infect the mind and manners of every individual, through deceptions ranging from paper currency and subsidized newspapers to government spies and the “legitimate” post-Revolutionary order in Europe’.¹⁰⁷ This narrative of political corruption was produced for an audience that reflected the complex cultural shifts of the British public sphere during the period. The tight network of tavern ‘free and easies’ and ultra-radical gatherings in underground London that acted as the primary sites of reception for Spence’s writing did not yet constitute a truly expansive radical plebeian public sphere in the sense of its bourgeois counterpart centred around the *Edinburgh Review*. To achieve the kind of cultural diffusion enjoyed by the bourgeois public sphere, it was necessary to maintain a consistent print presence that could be adapted by the various public sites of reception for the early nineteenth-century radical audience.

The *Political Register*, particularly in its postwar format, became the principal vehicle for such an audience.

The assemblies that developed around Cobbett's readership were key examples of the cultural power of what Jon Klancher has called the 'focused gathering'.¹⁰⁸ Coming together across England—both in the industrial north and the agrarian south—in places like the Hampden Clubs (after 1815), the rural village workplaces of the weavers and the artisanate, and to lesser extent, the radical taverns and pubs of the major urban centres, Cobbett's readers and listeners were at the centre of a powerful new cultural formation: the self-organized popular radical public. Cobbett's relationship with this public was not without its contradictions. Indeed, he often looked with distrust toward the Hampden Clubs and radical taverns of the London underground, perhaps fearing the development of a rival Radical base in the former and the moral anarchism and sexual libertinism of the latter.¹⁰⁹ Despite these misgivings on Cobbett's part, the reading and dissemination of his journal formed a central part of the activities of gatherings in the Hampden Clubs and radical taverns.¹¹⁰ Often out of financial necessity, this public relied upon cultural mechanisms such as group subscriptions and public readings, that in their very form served as practical illustrations of the larger communitarian ideal plebeian radicals like Cobbett were attempting to communicate in their writings. The aims of these gatherings were as simple as they were practical: to both develop a critical knowledge sufficient to comprehend the material transformation of their day-to-day lives, and, attaining this, to come up with a complementary strategy for collective political and economic liberation. I argue that the social criticism of the *Political Register*, particularly after 1816, became the print extension of this new form of plebeian cultural praxis. Cobbett summed up this liberatory aim pithily in the first line of his 1831 pamphlet *Two Penny Trash*: 'The object of this publication is, to explain to the people of this kingdom *what it is* that, in spite of all the industry and frugality that they can practice, *keeps them poor*.'¹¹¹ Perhaps no other line in Cobbett's prolific journalistic output better represents the practical political imperative that lay behind

radical writing in the plebeian public sphere. Richard Altick, in his pioneering study of popular reading practices in the nineteenth century, *The English Common Reader* (1957), describes this genre of social criticism as ‘a new kind of journalism, which trenchantly commented on domestic events and prescribed remedies for the desperate state in which the workers found themselves.’¹¹²

Cobbett often went to great personal lengths to reach the readers and listeners excluded from the bourgeois public. Indeed, no other intellectual of the period dedicated himself so tirelessly to physically engaging with his readership in fora like ale-house lectures and reform meetings.¹¹³ It was thus in the heat of face-to-face political exchange, rather than in scholarly isolation, that his unique cultural criticism developed. This close proximity between journalist and public led E.P. Thompson to declare that ‘few writers can be found who were so much the “voice” of their own audience’ as Cobbett.¹¹⁴ These excursions by Cobbett to gather the ‘material evidence’ for his social criticism culminated in perhaps his most famous—and representative—literary project, the *Rural Rides* series, first published in the *Political Register* during the early and mid 1820s (discussed below).

When the first of Cobbett’s ‘Perish Commerce!’ articles appeared in the *Political Register*, British society was undergoing another painful stage in its long-term transformation from a localised agricultural economy to a mass manufacturing and trading one. With the dramatic expansion of urbanisation and mass industrial manufacturing an older agrarian economy based on domestic self-sufficiency and bartering was being displaced. These colonising social forces based around profit and the free flow of goods were being hailed at the time in an ideologically ascendant discourse emanating from journals like the liberal *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett often mocked the journal as ‘Old Mother Mange’ for the strong Ricardian orientation of contributors like J.R. McCulloch and Francis Horner.¹¹⁵ What Cobbett, for polemical purposes, compressed as the ‘Scotch system’ was in fact a complex convergence of material economic forces and powerful ideas of liberal individualism that, taken together, fuelled the new capitalist expansion. Building

upon the critique he had developed a few years earlier of the 'Pittite System' of war finance, Cobbett sought in these provocatively titled articles to alert his readers to the cultural crisis being induced by the new commercial system.

The first article in the 'Perish Commerce!' series, published in November 1807, was ostensibly an affirming review of William Spence's controversial pamphlet *Britain Independent of Commerce*.¹¹⁶ This publication was a defence of Britain's wartime system of trade retaliation against Napoleonic Europe. Spence's central thesis suggested that the 'agrarian basis of prosperity' of the British economy could not be undermined by the trade blockade, and in doing so provided an implicit critique of the manufacturing and trading system apparently at risk because of the embargo with the Continent.¹¹⁷ It provoked a powerful critical response from the leading intellectual proponents of free trade, among them Thomas Malthus, in an article written for the *Edinburgh Review*, and James Mill, in a pamphlet entitled *Commerce Defended*.¹¹⁸ Another prominent supporter of the free trade position at the time was Henry Brougham, employed as counsel by merchants from London, Liverpool and Manchester to argue the case for the repeal of the Orders.¹¹⁹ Brougham also contributed a number of articles on the issue for the *Edinburgh Review*, arguing in effect that the commercial system itself was heading for a crisis stage with the added threat of war with post-Revolutionary America.¹²⁰ In short, Spence's pamphlet initiated a considerable debate in the British public sphere as to the merits of the new commercial and trading system at a time when that system was in a period of manifest crisis. More importantly for the argument of this chapter, it provided Cobbett with a timely platform from which to exclaim his profound dislike of the new commercial order.

Cobbett's agenda in the article series had three primary components. The first part consisted of acting as a 'common sense' advocate for Spence and his neo-Physiocratic ideas. Related to this act of elucidation was Cobbett's role as a public tribune heralding the imminent death of the British financial system, to which he hoped to contribute through his act of radical counterpublicity. Finally, he sought to recover the lineaments of that older,

agrarian civilization that the new commercial and manufacturing system had displaced. This intellectual project was, in sum, a ‘Sisyphean task of attempting to turn the nation back towards self-sufficiency’, as Daniel Green has described it, and without undue exaggeration.¹²¹

In the opening article of the series Cobbett sensed a rare opportunity to bolster the anti-commercial argument during a period of external conflict and internal crisis. He writes, with some relish: ‘Pitt is gone, commerce, as the foundation of a system of politics, will soon follow him, and let us hope that Englishmen will once more see their country something like what it formerly was.’¹²² Indeed, in November of 1807, with the forces of Napoleonic Europe capturing the Portuguese coast and effectively sealing off the Continent to British advance, this kind of prediction seemed anything but far-fetched prophecy. Cobbett’s intervention into the debate on free trade, then, was an act of political urgency as well as ideological demystification. The commercial system he had begun to critique in earlier articles from the *Register* like ‘Paper Aristocracy’ and ‘The Pittite System’, was linked in his mind to a political order that he felt would soon destroy itself. In this article Cobbett expressed his view that the servants of the new commercial system—those fundholders, stockjobbers, placemen and merchants—were actively conspiring against the interests of the nation: ‘There is one light, indeed, in which I have viewed commercial men with an evil eye; and that is, as the constant supporters and applauders of Pitt, whom I regard as the author of all the evils that we suffer and that we dread, and whose supporters, therefore, it is impossible for me to like.’¹²³ Despite the rhetorical affinities this statement shares with ordinary party political polemic of the period, its explicitly commercial focus would have profound implications for the development of popular anti-capitalist discourse in the early nineteenth century.

At the opening of this first article Cobbett cautioned his readers to have patience with his project of economic explication. ‘This is a subject that requires *thinking*’, he writes.¹²⁴ In this critical mode Cobbett sought to embody the figure of the ‘honest talking’

teacher to his wider public, carefully guiding them towards 'a general conviction of the soundness of our doctrine,' as he called Spence's thesis in the pamphlet.¹²⁵ Indeed, by publishing large extracts of Spence's pamphlet in the article along with a constant flow of his own commentary, it could be argued that Cobbett was demonstrating for his audience the kind of thorough reading practices he thought constituted 'really useful knowledge'. In the lifeworld of plebeian radicalism Cobbett was engaging with, there was very much a sense of the positive uses of this kind of 'good' knowledge working against the propaganda of the state and the ruling classes, which for Cobbett came as much from the bourgeois press as from ministerial documents. In this sense Spence's pamphlet 'is not to be read like one of Pitt's speeches...that is to say, with a continual anxiety to come at the end,' but instead requires steady and sober analysis for the lessons it may yield in the larger effort to overthrow the current commercial system in favour of a return to an older ideal of agrarian self-sufficiency.¹²⁶

After a long initial extract from Spence's pamphlet describing the specious value of commercial trade to the overall wealth of Britain, Cobbett declares, without self-modesty, that 'justice to myself urges me to show, that this reasoning is not new, and that it was made by me long ago'.¹²⁷ Cobbett is clearly at pains here to remind his audience that Spence's anti-commercial argument is not some newly acquired posture for him, but instead reflects the careful evolution of his social criticism in the *Political Register* from 1804. Cobbett's review of his previous critical positions provides a useful summary of this evolving anti-commercial ideology in the pages of the *Political Register*: 'Mr Spence, it is *possible*, has never read, or heard of, any of my remarks upon the wild wars of Pitt and Dundas for the preservation of India; upon colonial expeditions in general ...upon the childish notion, that we should be all ruined, if the paper-money were annihilated; upon, in short, first or last, every topic that he has touched upon relative to the importance of commerce.'¹²⁸ As is clear from this catalogue, Cobbett was intending this particular

intellectual intervention as a consolidation of his earlier critiques of Britain's evolving structures of commercial modernity.

Part of this anti-commercial ideology Cobbett was expounding in the 'Perish Commerce!' articles was no more than an expression of his vehement belief that export commerce was an instrument of social inequality. This hostility to free trade was justified, like much of Cobbett's social criticism, on the simple moral conviction that commercial export created and exacerbated material inequalities at home: 'The fact is, that exports of every sort, generally speaking, only tend *to enrich a few persons* and to cause the labouring part of the people to live harder than they otherwise would do.'¹²⁹ Cobbett was intent on exposing the contemporary commercial and manufacturing system for what it was: an elitely organised system based on private profit and state patronage that excluded the vast majority of his 'popular imaginary' in the English countryside—that vast hinterland of rural workers 'bred to agricultural pursuits'.¹³⁰ It is important to remember that for Cobbett, the debate over the new commercial system was as much an argument about the elimination of a way of life as it was about economic efficiency.

In this article Cobbett also sought to counteract the pervasive network of misinformation of the new 'commercial tribe', as he called them, concerning the beneficial aspects of free trade.¹³¹ An essential part of this populist counter-hegemonic project was to emphasize over and over again the fundamentally class-based nature of liberal economic discourse. Cobbett wanted his readers to be in no doubt as to who were the primary beneficiaries from the material wealth produced by the current commercial system: 'To hear these merchants and their ignorant partisans talk, one would almost suppose, that, if sincere in their expressions of alarm [over the loss of overseas markets], they must look upon commerce as the sole source of our food and raiment, and even of the elements which are necessary to man's existence. Commerce, they tell us, is "essential to the vital interests" of the country.'¹³² Referring to the tax regime that favoured the commercial exports of a social elite, Cobbett fumed: 'Nothing is more convenient for the purpose of a

squandering, jobbing, corrupting, bribing minister, than a persuasion amongst the people, that it is from the *commerce*, and not from *their labour*, that the taxes come; and it has long been a fashionable way of thinking, that, it is no matter how great the expenses are, so that the commerce does but keep pace with them in increase.’¹³³ As if present in the village workshop where his article was being read and discussed, Cobbett urges his audience to reflect upon the material effects of this new commercial settlement, and, in the process, come to a new appreciation of their indispensable role in the production of national wealth: ‘The commerce has been tripled, and so have the *parish paupers*. Away, then, I beseech you, with this destructive delusion! See the thing in its true light. Look upon *all* the taxes as arising out of *the land and the labour*, and distrust either the head or the heart of the man who would cajole you with a notion of their arising from any other source.’¹³⁴ In its resonant demotic voice of plebeian outrage this was a critical narrative attempting to demonstrate, a decade before Marx’s birth, what the German philosopher would later call the ‘antagonistic nature of capitalist accumulation’.¹³⁵

In a later installment of the ‘Perish Commerce!’ series, Cobbett continued this interrogation of the commercial system with a compelling historical narrative that sought to establish a link in his readers’ minds between the destructive force of commerce and the loss of social rights. The argument articulated throughout the article remains one of the most accessible accounts of the ‘Old Corruption’ thesis. Rejecting liberal charges that the ‘annihilation of commerce’ would result in a ‘retrace’ of ‘the steps which brought us from feudal tyranny’, Cobbett revives the Spencean metaphor of ‘roots’ based reform as the only solution to the corrupt political and economic system: ‘My answer is, that, while, by annihilating commerce, we should not retrace one of those steps, we should cut up by the roots that political corruption, which, in a thousand ways, has operated to our oppression at home, and has been the chief cause of all the dangers, with which we are now menaced from abroad.’¹³⁶ Cobbett bases his reasoning on an argument that brings together the historical myth of ‘democratic’ Saxon constitutionalism with the contemporary plebeian

suspicion of corrupt government. He creates a historical narrative where ancient kings, ‘in order to free themselves from the tyranny of the barons’ had ‘called in the people to their aid’.¹³⁷ This act of royal populism, Cobbett argues, created an embryonic economic and political democracy where a common people newly armed with political privileges were thus enabled ‘to possess property’.¹³⁸ The new community of property-holders became ‘free men’, or ‘freeholders’, and served as the most vigilant guardians of English liberty before the ‘Norman yoke’ was imposed in 1066. Cobbett’s narrative here attempts to historicize the myth of the ‘freeborn Englishman’ in a manner that would appeal to a population of agricultural labourers, artisans and farmers being displaced by a combination of high taxation with the rise of industrial economies of scale.¹³⁹

In many ways this narrative is a direct inversion of the liberal Whig ideology of commercial and political freedom promoted by the editors of the *Edinburgh Review*. For Cobbett, the manipulations of the market by a rapacious political elite has ‘set the country at defiance’ from its true interests.¹⁴⁰ The ethic of capitalist self-interest that ‘forms men together in large companies’ and thus attracts privileged ministerial attention, leads to a state of affairs where ‘the government becomes interwoven with a funding system’.¹⁴¹ Cobbett elaborates on this aspect of ‘Old Corruption’: ‘The commercial and the funding systems are inseparable. One cannot go to any mischievous length without the other; and by the latter, that is to say, by rendering a considerable part of the population mere state annuitants, the nation is made to be even zealous in promoting its own ruin.’¹⁴² Perhaps most importantly for Cobbett, the new commercial system ‘has destroyed the natural influence of the proprietors and cultivators of the land’ — that class of farmers and freeholders whose activities had sustained a broader moral economy of village craftsmen and agricultural workers in the English countryside. It is this undermining of customary social relations by a new logic of capitalist self-interest that animates Cobbett’s outrage here: ‘Commerce... has caused the national character to be degraded, it being notorious, that, upon almost

every occasion, the question has been, not what is just, but what is expedient, the expediency turning solely upon the interests of commerce.’¹⁴³

Later in the article, Cobbett speculates on how a self-sufficient agrarian-based economy would develop in the wake of a collapse of the export market for commercial manufacturing. As part of this he anticipates the development of a fully functioning organic economy based on the interchangeable roles of artisan, farmer and shepherd: ‘Well, then, I think our manufacturing industry might, without any riding upon three edged rails, be as suddenly turned upon agriculture; for it is pretty evident, that a man weaver will learn to thresh quite as soon as a thresher will learn to weave; and that a boy or girl spinner will learn to weed or to tend sheep quite as soon as a boy or girl shepherd or weaver will learn to spin.’¹⁴⁴ Cobbett is at pains to emphasize the notion of an all-inclusive economic system that leaves no worker out. Indeed, this is his principal critique of the industrial reforms of traditional agricultural practices. This speculation on the roles of artisans and labourers in the contemporary economy, however, was far from an abstract intellectual exercise. The ‘Captain Swing’ riots in 1830 that climaxed the ‘class struggle in the countryside’, as A.L. Morton has aptly described the collective practices of radical plebeian resistance, was initiated and sustained primarily by these victims of mechanization in the rural and village economy.¹⁴⁵ But over and above this practical economic argument about the new system’s inevitable production of surplus labour, the return to an agrarian economy also promised moral benefits to its participants. Cobbett insists that a restoration of the agrarian economy would encourage ‘good morals, the health and bodily strength of the people’.¹⁴⁶ As can be seen from this sustained critique of commercial practices in the article, the hallmarks of Cobbett’s economic philosophy were self-sufficiency and simplicity.

In the spring of 1808 Cobbett again returned to the urgent economic debates of the period with the final instalment of his ‘Perish Commerce!’ series. The topic this time was the deleterious affect of the proposed General Enclosure Bill on an already fragile rural economy under siege from punitive rates of taxation on staple household items and the

competing claims of bankers and mortgages. The bill was a piece of legislation proposed by the Portland Government that would have drastically limited the land available for independent cultivation. For Cobbett the cultural traditionalist the idea that the government would expropriate communal lands utilized for popular recreation and independent economic activity was morally abhorrent. He fumed that the bill ‘would be like a bed of Procrustes’ representing ‘an outrageous invasion of private property’.¹⁴⁷ The stated reason for the legislation—that it would increase agricultural output—was contested by Cobbett on simple empirical grounds: ‘But, my opinion is, that it would cause no increase at all in the quantity of food raised; and this opinion I shall retain, until I *see all the lands now enclosed producing every year*, a crop more than sufficient to pay all the expenses of rent, taxes, and tillage.’¹⁴⁸ This critique is an excellent example of Cobbett’s acutely experiential-based social criticism with its practical concern for the material well-being of the exploited country worker and independent farmer.

Taken together, the ‘Perish Commerce!’ articles represent plebeian cultural criticism as an engaged, coherent and practical intellectual project intent on the destruction, and ultimate replacement, of the contemporary economic system with an agrarian alternative. Of this, Noel Thompson has observed that Cobbett’s writing ‘was permeated throughout by an essential incomprehension of, and antipathy to, the increasing industrialization of the economy and commercialization of economic life’.¹⁴⁹ But it would be unfair to dismiss the anti-industrial and anti-commercial ethos articulated by Cobbett in the ‘Perish Commerce!’ articles as utopian or politically naive. He sincerely believed that his project of counterpublicity was helping to contribute to the ultimate reversal of the long-term cultural and economic modernization underway in England’s countryside. Arming his readers in the plebeian public sphere with the most relevant facts and arguments concerning the state of the economy was his own attempt at generating ‘really useful knowledge’. This project would continue with his next major article series for the *Political Register*, an analysis of the 1810-11 Bullion Report polemically entitled ‘Paper Against Gold’.

Much like Spence in his pamphlet *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, Cobbett turned his legal persecution by the authorities into a unique platform for radical counterpublicity. Imprisoned at Newgate in June 1810 for his public condemnation of the army practice of flogging, he used this ‘enforced withdrawal from the world’, according to Daniel Green, ‘as a period during which he would attempt to fit his various arguments about the National Debt, paper money, taxation, poverty and prices into a series of linked articles that would explain to his fellow countrymen the reasons for their economic ills’.¹⁵⁰ The publication of the report of the Bullion Committee on 8 June provided the ostensible impetus for his critical project. The committee had its origins in a question Cobbett was deeply engaged with at this time: whether the Bank of England was to blame for the inflationary spiral of the war years through its overissue of paper money.¹⁵¹ One of the chairs of the Committee was the leading Whig political economist and frequent *Edinburgh Review* contributor Francis Horner. Horner’s expertise in the technical issues of monetary theory and his reputation in London as a leading proponent of the ‘indispensability of employing the language of political economy in analyzing the functioning of contemporary society’ made both him and his ideas a prime target for Cobbett’s polemical pen.¹⁵² Cobbett’s objectives in this article series were thus counter-hegemonic in the sense that he wanted to expose the abstractions of commercial finance employed by both the Committee and the leading bourgeois journals of the day for what they were: an elitely contrived and mystifying language that functioned to conceal the larger aims of a parasitic capitalism. The basic arguments put forth in ‘Paper Against Gold’ need to be analyzed as a key articulation of the radical plebeian project of economic reform. Indeed, Cobbett thought so highly of this aspect of his intellectual project that he later referred to the articles as ‘the best of my life’, and subsequently reissued them in book form.¹⁵³

Following Spence’s epistolary format in *Restorer of Society to its Natural State*, Cobbett frames his argument in ‘Paper Against Gold’ through a succession of letters signed from Newgate State prison. In their carefully constructed thematic sections and

transparently didactic tone they resemble a popular lecture series in the form of correspondence. The long subtitle to the articles, 'Being an Examination of the Report of the Bullion Committee in a Series of Letters to the Tradesmen and Farmers in or Near Salisbury', gives an indication of the audience Cobbett sought to address. It was this labouring section of the agricultural economy that he believed to be most at risk in the rapidly expanding paper-money system. As in his 'Perish Commerce!' articles published some three years earlier, Cobbett's argument in the 'Paper Against Gold' series presumes class interest to be at the heart of the current fiscal and monetary policies pursued by the government.

In the introduction to the first letter Cobbett lays out the theme he will pursue throughout the twenty-five letters issued during the twelve-month periodical cycle of the *Political Register*. Writing with the customary informality of criticism in the plebeian public sphere, Cobbett sets his aim for these articles: '...I think it may not be amiss, if upon this occasion, I address myself to you. I have introduced myself to you without any ceremony; but before we part, we shall become well acquainted; and, I make no doubt, that you will understand the distinction between Paper-Money and Gold-Money much too well for it to be in the power of any one ever again to deceive you...' ¹⁵⁴ Cobbett sees his intellectual function as facilitating the public understanding of the official conclusions published in the Report, which, as he skeptically relates, suggest 'that it is possible to lessen the quantity of the paper-money, and to cause guineas to come back again and to pass from hand to hand as in former times' without 'the total destruction of the paper-money' system. ¹⁵⁵ Mocking the intellectual arrogance and moral self-regard of the bourgeois public sphere, Cobbett reminds his readers and listeners of the practical material issues at stake in public debates like this one: 'Gentlemen; we, the people of this country, have been persuaded to believe many things. We have been persuaded to believe ourselves to be "the *most thinking* people in Europe;" but, to what purpose do men think, unless they arrive at useful knowledge by thinking?' ¹⁵⁶ Indeed, this conception of 'useful knowledge'

can serve as the defining motif in 'Paper Against Gold', and, for that matter, Cobbett's wider intellectual project in the plebeian public sphere. He ends the introduction with a sobering articulation of why such a project is now so urgently necessary for the material well-being of his readership: '...such is our present situation in this country, that every man, who has a family to preserve from want, ought to endeavour to make himself acquainted with the nature, and with the probable consequences, of the paper-money now afloat.'¹⁵⁷

Cobbett's critique of the paper money system—and by implication, the finance-driven capitalism of the early nineteenth century—was based on a conviction that the older gold and silver-based system of wealth storage provided a natural barrier to the funding of a complex and extravagant commercial economy. For Cobbett, the advent of paper money and modern financial techniques such as credit and interest, allowed a small elite to both control and multiply their political advantages whilst also leading to the abandonment of the self-sufficient, agrarian-based economy in favour of commercial trade and mass industrial production. But above all, Cobbett mistrusted the abstractions and mystifications promoted by the paper money system. The more paper money served as the primary vehicle of domestic trade in Britain, Cobbett reasoned, the more difficult it became for the labouring classes to identify both who and what was behind their exploitation. Cobbett wanted his readers to recognize the connection between the paper-money system and the growing burden of indirect taxation on such staple items of the domestic household as salt, beer, sugar, candles, bricks and tiles, and soap.

Cobbett begins his interrogation of the capitalist abstractions represented by the paper money system with a simple reminder of its use value as method of exchange for goods. He writes: '*Money is the representative, or the token of property, or things of value.* The money, while used as money, is of no other use; and therefore, a bit of lead or of wood or of leather, would be as good as gold or silver, to be used as money.'¹⁵⁸ Ever the practical materialist, Cobbett wanted his audience to see the root causes of their

domestic discomfort beyond the mysteries of this newly dominant method of transaction: ‘...while we are all acquainted with the fact, and while many of us are most sensibly feeling the *effects*, scarcely a man amongst us takes the trouble to inquire into the cause... We see the country abounding with paper-money; we see every man’s band full of it; we frequently talk of it as a strange thing, and a great evil; but never do we inquire into the cause of it.’¹⁵⁹ With an appeal to collective folk memory, Cobbett goes on to trace the spread of the new currency of exchange with a particular focus on the changing pattern of social relations in the English countryside: ‘There are few of you, who cannot remember the time, when there was scarcely ever a bank note among Tradesmen and Farmers... People, in those days, used to carry little bags to put their money in, instead of the paste-board or leather cases that they now carry.’¹⁶⁰ The advent of smaller units of denomination, accelerated by the suspension of gold payments to the Bank of England in 1797, gradually displaced the precious metals as the primary currencies of exchange and, in Cobbett’s argument, led to the current situation —disastrous for poor agricultural workers—of inflated prices for staple goods.

In the second half of this first article, Cobbett gives a short history of modern finance as a preface to his larger investigation. Describing the Bank of England as ‘a mere human institution, arising out of causes having nothing miraculous, or supernatural, about them’, Cobbett locates the current system as an extension of the war economy of the late seventeenth century.¹⁶¹ To fund the new institution the government invited wealthy private investors to lend some £1,200,000. Ever intent on highlighting class antagonism, Cobbett reminds his readers that this loan to the King was secured by the payment of interest through the taxation of ‘beer, ale, and other liquors’.¹⁶² Depositors were given banknotes as a ‘written promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of the notes’. Crucially for Cobbett, this new arrangement also led to the development of the dreaded funding system of stockholders, and with it, modern finance capitalism: ‘In time, when more and more and more money had been borrowed by the government, in this way of mortgage upon the

taxes, there grew a thing called the *Stocks*, or the *Funds*; but the Bank Company remained under its primitive name, and, as the *debt* of the nation increased, this Company increased its *riches* and in consequence.’¹⁶³ As we can see, Cobbett’s principal aim in this introductory article was to demonstrate in clear, if often polemical, prose the elite origins of the contemporary commercial system. The Bank of England in this narrative was ‘merely a company of mortal men, formed into an association of traders’ and fuelled by the issue of paper notes which, Cobbett observes, were ‘nothing more than written promises to pay the bearer so much money in gold or silver’.¹⁶⁴

In the second letter published a week later in the *Political Register*, Cobbett continues with his investigation of paper money, this time focusing on the way it functioned to sustain the current funding system. As in his previous article, Cobbett begins with a cautionary note regarding the mystification surrounding key terms like ‘Fund’ and ‘National Debt’ used in the new discourse of commercial finance. ‘These are words,’ he writes, ‘which are frequently made use of; but like many other words, they stand for things which are little understood, and the less, perhaps, because the words are so very commonly used’.¹⁶⁵ He continues: ‘...if a right understanding of the meaning of these words be, in all cases where the words are used, of some consequence, it is of peculiar consequence here, where... we shall find the *Funds*, the *Stocks*, and the *National Debt*, to be so closely interwoven with the *Bank Notes*, as to be quite inseparable therefrom in every possible state or stage of their existence.’¹⁶⁶ This passage neatly illustrates Cobbett’s intellectual role in these articles. He seeks to be both practical pedagogue and engaged social critic, patiently deciphering the reifying language employed by the new financial elite in order to rally some kind of collective political resistance in defence of pre-commercial agrarian values. Cobbett is attempting to explain to his audience how paper money actually worked to create wealth for its manipulators in the funding system. This was ‘an inquiry,’ he explains, ‘worthy of the undivided attention of every true Englishman’ and ‘every man who wishes to see this country of his forefathers preserved from ruin and subjugation’.¹⁶⁷

It cannot be overemphasized how mysterious the workings of the financial system would have appeared to most of Cobbett's readership. Puncturing this mystification for his readers became a key part of Cobbett's intellectual project. Actively identifying with his audience's perplexity, Cobbett attempts to materialize the funding system as a 'place... of a sort of mysterious existence; a sort of financial Ark; a place not, perhaps, to be touched, or even seen...' ¹⁶⁸ His critical aim is 'to remove, from the mind of every creature, all doubt upon this point; to dissipate the mists, in which we have so long been wandering about...' ¹⁶⁹ As part of this 'common-sense' view of finance, Cobbett illustrates a hypothetical case where a 'Messrs. Muckworm and Company' lend a million pounds to the government in return for a steady stream of interest. ¹⁷⁰ He stresses that these funds 'have no bodily existence, either in the shape of money or of bonds or of certificates or of any thing else that can be touched'. ¹⁷¹ The new funds, or stock, merely represent '*a right to receive interest*' on the part of the fundholder. ¹⁷² Now enter farmer Greenhorn, the honest labourer 'who has all his life long been working like a horse, in order to secure his children from the perils of poverty...' ¹⁷³ After bequeathing his farm to his son, this mythical farmer sells the rest of his property in exchange for 'two thousand pounds of Muckworm's Funds'. ¹⁷⁴ But, as Cobbett points out, this money in the funds has already '*been spent by the government*' and '*Muckworm has now the two thousand pounds of poor Grizzle Greenhorn*'. ¹⁷⁵ This, Cobbett suggests to his readers, 'explains the whole art and mystery of making loans and funds and stocks and national debts'. ¹⁷⁶ Here, in simple accessible prose, is Cobbett's critique of the new finance capitalist system he believed to be responsible for much of the country's contemporary social ills. Traveling around the countryside in the South of England some fifteen years later for his pioneering social geography *Rural Rides*, Cobbett would map out the grim results of this funding system.

In the third letter of the series Cobbett deepened his critique of the funding and commercial system. After a recent outbreak of popular violence against the tradesmen who printed the paper-currency, Cobbett felt it necessary to open this particular instalment with a

defence of the *trade* of ‘money making’: ‘Paper-money making is a trade, or calling, perfectly innocent in itself, and the tradesmen may be very moral and even very liberal men’.¹⁷⁷ Cobbett is keen for his audience to understand that it is not these makers of the paper-money notes that should be attacked—who were, after all, artisans of a sort—but the system that employs their services and endangers the existence of the wider artisanate, as well as that of the rural labourers. For all of Cobbett’s strident demonology of the leading figures in the political system, he insists that his is, above all, a systemic critique rather than a personal one: ‘...the fault is not in the individuals, but in the system, out of which the swarm of paper-money makers have grown as naturally and as innocently as certain well-known little animals are engendered by, and live upon, an impoverished and sickly carcass.’¹⁷⁸ This is another instance of the way Cobbett’s critical discourse sought to attack the symbols of the new commercial system while always keeping in the foreground for his readers the ordinary lives disrupted by the changing forces of production.

An excellent example of this experiential aspect of Cobbett’s criticism was his explication, in simple and direct language, of the deleterious social effects of government taxation as an integral part of the new commercial system. He constructs his argument with an eye to the class antagonism that animates the new commercial system, arguing that leading writers on the subject, while praising the prosperity produced by the new economy, never consider ‘the *ease* and *comfort* of the people who pay the taxes’.¹⁷⁹ Cobbett argues that taxation was the legal means by which a wealthy urban elite appropriated the surplus produced by the lower classes in the countryside. If it continued, he warned, the labouring classes ‘will have the means of *bare existence* left’.¹⁸⁰ As part of this economic process ‘their clothing and their dwellings will become miserable, their food bad, or in stinted quantity’, while the surplus that they create ‘will be *annihilated* by those who do nothing but eat’.¹⁸¹ This idea of an idle but rapacious elite greedily consuming for themselves the wealth produced by the labouring classes was a frequent and effective trope in plebeian

cultural discourse, conceiving as it did the policies of government enforced *laissez-faire* in visceral rather than abstract terms.

Cobbett developed his discourse of economic populism as an appeal to the ‘native common-sense’ of the labouring classes in the agricultural economy. By doing this he was attempting to construct a compelling counter-narrative to the ideologically ascendant discourse of liberal political economy promoted by bourgeois journals like the *Edinburgh Review*. He stressed the need for different indices of what the political economists called ‘national prosperity’. This term was a powerful abstraction utilized to promote the benefits of economic modernization in Britain from the perspective of a small elite of financiers, company directors, wealthy consumers, and high level government bureaucrats. This conception of national prosperity, Cobbett argued, was demonstrated in ‘the increase of the number of chariots and of fine-dressed people’, rather than in the ‘good morals, of *the labouring classes of the people*’.¹⁸² Far from promoting the well-being of the labouring classes, this notion of prosperity, according to Cobbett, has had the opposite effect. In a series of rhetorical questions to his audience, Cobbett highlights the material inequalities produced by the new financial system and its shambolic notion of prosperity: ‘Have our labourers a plentiful meal of food fit for a man? Do they taste meat once in *a day*? Are they decently clothed? Have they the means of obtaining firing? Are they and their children healthy and happy?’¹⁸³ With an appeal to the common experience of his audience in the plebeian public sphere, he adds, ‘I put these questions to you, Gentlemen, who have the means of knowing the facts, and who must, I am afraid, answer them all in the negative’.¹⁸⁴

Cobbett concludes the letter with a comparison of the ratio of taxation to the amount of the Poor Rates over a twenty year period ending in 1803. Using official parliamentary figures he points to the fact that over these two decades the taxation rate had nearly quadrupled whilst the Poor Rate more than doubled. ‘Here, then’, he declares, ‘we have pretty good proof, that *taxation* and *pauperism* go hand in hand’.¹⁸⁵ This use of statistics

by Cobbett illustrates the socially purposive nature of his educational project in the plebeian public sphere. He wished to arm his audience with the intellectual means to attaining immediate material improvement in their lives and that of their communities. Unlike bourgeois initiatives in popular education like the SDUK, Cobbett conceived of useful knowledge as an essentially partisan struggle over the conceptual tools governing the new economic settlement. He clearly despised the new economic language of statistical abstraction, but, as this argument at the close of Letter three shows, he was unwilling to surrender its uses entirely to the political economists.

In the eleventh letter of the series Cobbett demonstrates the part played by media manipulation in the perpetuation of the current funding system. By admitting his own culpability in this ideological process as a former pamphleteer for the Pittites, he emphasizes how the power of opinion can be so easily engineered to the advantage of a corrupt economic system: '*Credit* is a thing wholly dependent upon *opinion*... As long as men *believe* in the riches of any individual, or any company, so long he or they possess all the advantages of riches.'¹⁸⁶ But, pointing to the inherent instability of the financial system, Cobbett goes on to argue that this capricious phenomenon can easily lead in the opposite direction, towards a collapse of the system:

...when once *suspicion* is excited, no matter from what cause, the *credit* is shaken; and, a very little matter oversets it. So long as the *belief is implicit*, the person, towards whom it exists, goes on, not only with all the appearances, but with all the advantages, of wealth; though, at the same time, he be insolvent. But, if his wealth be not *solid*; if he have merely the *appearance* of wealth; if he be unable to pay so much as he owes, or in other words, if he be *insolvent*... he is liable to have his insolvency exposed. Any accident, that excites alarm in the minds of his creditors, brings the whole upon him at once; and he who might otherwise have gone on for years is stopped in an instant.¹⁸⁷

Cobbett seeks to demonstrate here the fragility of this new system of credit and finance-driven wealth. He also is attempting to show the role that radical counterpublicity can play in bringing on the system's demise and eventual replacement with a more popularly responsive one. Public exposure is the key to this kind of communicative praxis, and not through official avenues like the publication of the Bullion Committee report, or semi-

official ones like the monetarist arguments published in the *Edinburgh Review*, but instead through demystifying articles like 'Paper Against Gold' circulated in the plebeian public sphere.

In the penultimate letter of the series, published in July 1811, Cobbett reduces the concept of paper money to its original function as a unit of exchange in the wider economy. By doing this, he attempts to revive a native plebeian skepticism, still residually present, against the abstractions promoted by the new system. He opens with a simple lesson about inflation: 'Money, of whatever sort, is, like everything else, lowered in its value in proportion as it becomes *abundant* or *plenty*.'¹⁸⁸ Always keen to return the focus in this debate back to the world of material *things*, he continues: 'The use of money is to serve men as a sign of the amount of the value of things that pass from man to man in the way of purchase and sale. It is *plenty*, or *scarce*, in proportion as its quantity is great or small compared with the quantity of things purchased and sold in the community; and whenever it becomes, from any cause, plenty, it *depreciates*, or sinks in value.'¹⁸⁹ During a period when financiers like Nathan Rothschild were beginning to amass millions based upon this very conception of abstract wealth, Cobbett's message would have a powerful resonance with a suspicious popular readership. But Cobbett's lesson goes beyond the mere arousal of popular suspicion. He also seeks to combat the growing fetishization of paper currency as a vehicle for the new commercial system. The implicit subtext is quite clear: money must never be considered as an object outside of its role as a unit of exchange in the communities in which it is circulated.

This was ultimately a lesson in the use value of paper money in the day-to-day lives of plebeian workers. To this end, Cobbett points out the difference between paper money and a staple 'commodity' like bread, 'one having a *real* value in its utility in supporting man, and the money having only an *imaginary* value'.¹⁹⁰ Cobbett is making a connection for his audience between these things of 'real value' which were the product of 'our soil and of our labour' and hence subject to a natural, if self-sustaining, scarcity, and the

artificiality of paper currency in the commercial market system, where an increase in the amount of paper money in circulation meant that ‘any given quantity of it would purchase less bread’.¹⁹¹ Again, this was a lesson with more than an abstract meaning to his readers. As a result of the inflation generated by the new paper money system, prices rose by some eighty percent between 1797 and 1818, making staple items for the ordinary plebeian household prohibitively expensive.¹⁹² When coupled with Cobbett’s ‘Old Corruption’ political critique that suggested it was the ‘Meetings and Combinations of the rich’ which directly influenced the dramatic increase in paper money during this period, the simple economic lesson in the article becomes filled with potentially revolutionary political implications.

Exposing the new financial elite who promoted the paper-money system, those men ‘*that had profited from that borrowing*’ on the National Debt, was perhaps the most important of Cobbett’s critical objectives.¹⁹³ According to him the new financial system was based upon a small parasitic group of capitalists who both compelled the payment on the interest of the debt, as well as constructed the means of doing so through the expanding system of paper money. For Cobbett the only question worth asking was not being addressed by the Bullion Committee. The question was whether the people can ‘*by any means, diminish the amount of the Dividends*’ paid on the debt.¹⁹⁴ He suggests that ‘if that question had been answered in the negative, there was no course, for those who wished to support the Pitt system, to pursue but that of letting things take their own course, and aid the paper with their *wishes*’.¹⁹⁵ But this attempt at public legitimization by the elite was in danger of backfiring. The issue had now been brought to the attention of the ‘public mind’, and the mystification surrounding it had been punctured, not least through pioneering efforts in counterpublicity and popular education like Cobbett’s article series.¹⁹⁶ By considering the committee’s recommendations in parliament, the economic elite had by no means closed off all debate on the larger political issues surrounding the paper money system. Still a believer in the possibilities of democratic discourse, Cobbett hints that the

establishment had now opened the issue up to the wider scrutiny of the labouring classes, and, with the aid of interlocutors like himself in the plebeian public sphere, were in danger of losing control of the debate.

The articles in 'Paper Against Gold' represent a critique of commercial capitalism from the ground up, holding the abstractions of the new system up to the kind of simple scrutiny that a farmer might employ when adding up the budget of his household or checking on the health of his livestock. When the practical diagnostic methods of this kind of 'good husbandry' are applied to the recommendations of the bankers and economists who make up the Bullion Committee, Cobbett demonstrates that the sums do not add up. Regardless of whether he was ultimately correct about the impending destruction of the paper-money system that fuelled so much of the early commercial expansion of the industrial revolution, Cobbett's analysis here is significant for the manner in which it confidently translates abstract economic terms and ideas into plain English for an audience living within its hard-edged material realities. This discourse is also notable for the way in which it attempts to provide a normative critique derived from a disappearing rural plebeian lifeworld to the new economic settlement being promoted—and later brutally enforced—by a corrupt government. Throughout this extraordinary series of letters published in the *Political Register*, Cobbett was above all attempting to stoke a 'legitimation crisis' for a system he viewed as profoundly immoral, unjust, and constructed upon an unsustainable foundation of monetary abstractions. It was an essential, if often overlooked, prelude to Cobbett's project of radical political reform pursued in the postwar period. His economic theories stemmed from a firm conviction, as A.L. Morton has put it, 'that the common people, his people, had been robbed, were being robbed and would continue to be robbed until they combined to check and control the property-owning class'.¹⁹⁷ Morton continues: 'This clear, simple conception of politics gave his demand for democracy, for Parliamentary Reform, a directness and an application to the desires of the masses which made him hated and feared by every Government from 1810 to 1830'.¹⁹⁸ This

establishment anxiety would reach its zenith with the publication of Cobbett's address 'To The Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland' in November of 1816.

In 'Perish Commerce!' and 'Paper Against Gold' Cobbett outlined for his readers and listeners in the plebeian public sphere the interwoven network of corruption in the commercial and political systems. In his 1816 address 'To The Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland' he maps out a strategy to transform it. Its publication in periodical form in the *Political Register* of November 2nd, and its simultaneous issuing in a two-penny, unstamped pamphlet designed for the widest possible circulation, marked the formal beginning of the intellectual project for radical political reform in Britain. The two-penny edition of the address suggested an awareness on Cobbett's part of the untapped cultural resources represented by the semi-literate labouring classes. As Kevin Gilmartin has observed, with the publication of this unstamped version of his address Cobbett had finally come to recognize the value of mass communication in the battle for radical reform: 'The price of the unstamped weekly, inextricably linked with the composition and scale of its reading audience, was among the most formidable and capacious signs of radical protest in print.'¹⁹⁹ Unlike his 'Paper Against Gold' series addressed to the 'tradesmen and farmers', the two-penny pamphlet directed its message to the 'journeymen' and labourers, who together made up the most marginalized segment of the postwar economy.

The address also marked a new stage of the radical intellectual project in the plebeian public sphere. Until its publication, the leading voices addressing the radical public were either presenting a quixotic utopianism, like Thomas Spence, or in Cobbett's case concentrating on a public education intended to expose the mystifications of the new economic settlement. Beginning with 'To The Journeymen and Labourers', a complementary strategy of collective protest coordinated through the radical press was developed for the political and economic liberation of the labouring classes. These were the

peak years of political activity in the plebeian public sphere, with the radical weekly occupying a central role in the wider movement. As E.P. Thompson observed, the time from the publication of Cobbett's address up to Peterloo 'were, above all, years in which popular Radicalism took its style from the hand press and the weekly periodical.'²⁰⁰ Along with the founding of T.J. Wooler's the *Black Dwarf* a year later in 1817, this address by Cobbett signalled a new emphasis on the weekly press as a vehicle for collective action in the plebeian public sphere. After the long years of patient education of his public, Cobbett had recognized that the time had now come for 'Meeting after meeting, petition on petition, remonstrance on remonstrance, until the country be saved!'.²⁰¹

Cobbett opens the address with a tribute to the material industriousness of the labouring classes. Reviewing the material products of Britain's commercial modernity—these 'many marks of national wealth' from 'superb furniture' and 'stately buildings' to 'numerous and stout ships' and 'warehouses teeming with goods'—Cobbett informs his audience that without 'the journeyman and labourer none of them could exist; without the assistance of their hands, the country would be a wilderness...'²⁰² This opening marks a change in Cobbett's discourse in which for the first time he formally recognizes the achievement of the nascent industrial working classes in Britain. Cobbett's rhetorical gesture is a deliberate broadening of the plebeian public sphere to include the workers involved in industrial manufacturing; an attempt to link their 'cultural resources' as readers and listeners with those of the rural artisanate, farmers and agricultural labourers who had previously formed the core of his audience. This new working class cultural space sought for the first time to unite a socially disparate and geographically dispersed popular audience as a collective agent of political transformation. 'Working class readers,' Kevin Gilmartin has argued, 'were in this way encouraged to understand their own experience as part of a collective historical process, and to perceive common interests among individuals widely separated in time and space'.²⁰³

Always striving to stoke the fires of class antagonism in his readers and listeners, Cobbett continues this panegyric to the labouring classes with a reminder of their contemporary demonization in the British public sphere: 'With this correct idea of your own worth in your minds, with what indignation must you hear yourselves called the Populace, the Rabble, the Mob, the Swinish Multitude...' ²⁰⁴ Like much of Cobbett's postwar journalism addressed to the labouring classes, these words are both an act of necessary esteem-building administered to a public inhibited by their sense of cultural marginalization, as well as an attempt to make them aware of their own powers of collective political agency. Cobbett the master publicist was keenly aware of the crucial importance of symbolic representation in the British public sphere and chided attempts by bourgeois propagandists to marginalize the labouring classes with Malthusian policies of 'poverty management'. He tells his audience: '...with what greater indignation, if possible, must you hear projects of those cool and cruel and insolent men, who, now that you have been, without any fault of your own, brought into a state of misery, propose to narrow the limits of parish relief, prevent you from marrying in the days of your youth, or to thrust you out to seek your bread in foreign lands, never more to behold your parents or your friends?' ²⁰⁵ Cobbett wanted to combat these assaults on the plebeian lifeworld with a concerted programme for radical political reform in the wider public sphere. Events have made it necessary, he suggests, for a new alliance to be constructed between the intellectual and worker: 'The nation... is fast advancing to that period when an important change must take place. It is the lot of mankind, that some shall labour with their hands and others with their minds; and, on all occasions, more especially on an occasion like the present, it is the duty of the latter to come to the assistance of the former.' ²⁰⁶ This is an outline for a new kind of cultural praxis that links dedicated critique from intellectuals like Cobbett to a wider programme of collective political reform agitated for on the ground by all of the disenfranchised labourers, from the weaver to the factory worker.

The body of the address contains an analysis of the ‘*cause* of our present miseries’ already familiar to readers of Cobbett’s previous efforts at public education like ‘Perish Commerce!’ and ‘Paper Against Gold’. As in those earlier works, Cobbett here argues that it is the burden of taxation on basic items like shoes, soap, candles, and bread that most bedevils the existence of the ordinary labourer. This taxation, he insists to his audience, has funded a war that has ended with the ‘mockery’ of a despotic Bourbon regime being restored in France. By shrewd implication Cobbett equates the state oppression of the populace in pre-Revolutionary France with the material distresses inflicted upon labourers in contemporary Britain. The tripling of the Poor Rates, he argues, is not a result of the idleness of the poor but the end-product of a political system that has decimated self-sustaining economies in support of a corrupt elite of ‘Sinecure Placemen’.²⁰⁷ A key addition to this familiar ‘Old Corruption’ critique, however, is Cobbett’s insistence here that it is the current democratic deficit which has allowed this system to flourish. He writes: ‘You have not had the management of the affairs of the nation. It is not *you* who have ruined the farmers and tradesmen. You want only food and raiment: you are ready to work for it; but you cannot go naked and without food.’²⁰⁸ Later, Cobbett extends this critique to include a full-blown programme of political reform: ‘The *remedy* is what we have now to look to, and that remedy consists wholly and solely of such a reform in the Common’s, or People’s House of Parliament, as shall give to every payer of *direct taxes* a vote at elections, and as shall cause the Members to be *elected annually*.’²⁰⁹ It could be argued that this reform was anticipated at the cultural level by the dramatic expansion of the print public for Cobbett’s address. According to Kevin Gilmartin, this was part of the strategy of counterpublicity where the ‘radical movement precipitated an unprecedented expansion of the print public sphere in order to return political representation to the House of Commons’.²¹⁰ The economic strategy of plebeian radicalism was equally indebted to the expansion of the print public sphere enacted by Cobbett’s address. Partly as a result of

the mass circulation of the pamphlet version, popular economic salvation through structural political reform soon became a key tenet of early nineteenth-century plebeian radicalism.

Cobbett is careful to articulate this message of radical reform within an existing tradition of English constitutional principles. Keenly aware of the immediate gratification promised by revolution, he warns his audience against its seductions: ‘...when you hear a man talking big and declaring about projects which *go farther than a real and radical reform of the Parliament*, be you well assured, that that man would be a second Robespierre...’²¹¹ In the English tradition of empirical pragmatism, Cobbett avoids grand political gesture to outline an attainable goal of reform: ‘In order effectually to avoid the rock of confusion, we should keep steadily in our eye, not only what we *wish* to be done, but what *can* be done *now*.’²¹² But within these practical limits he urges his audience that they ‘should neglect no opportunity of doing all that is within your power to give support to the cause of Reform’.²¹³ Cobbett envisions a grassroots petitioning effort as the primary means to achieving this programme of reform, with ‘no village so small that its petition would not have some weight’.²¹⁴ Despite his attempt to reach a new audience of the urban working classes in this address, Cobbett also recognized that the political actions of the rural village community still had an important role to play in the wider project of radical reform.

The orality of the text is emphasized in the conclusion, where Cobbett instructs his audience about the necessity of immediate political action to rectify their present situation. In a passage of powerful persuasion, Cobbett mocks the political quietism encouraged by bourgeois writers as an insidious form of cultural hegemony:

...never, until this age was *quietness* deemed a quality to be extolled. It would be no difficult matter to show, that the quiet, fireside, gentry are the most callous and cruel, and therefore, the most wicked, part of the nation. Amongst them it is that you find all the speculators, all the blood-suckers of various degrees, all the borough voters and their offspring, all the selfish and unfeeling wretches, who rather than risk the disturbing of their ease for one single month, rather than go a mile to hold up their hand at a public meeting, would see half the people perish with hunger and cold. The humanity, which is continually on their lips, is all fiction. They weep over the tale of woe in a novel; but, round their “decent fire-side,” never was compassion felt for a real sufferer, or indignation at the acts of a powerful tyrant. The object of the efforts of such writers are clearly enough seen. Keep all *quiet*! Do not *rouse*! Keep *still*! Keep *down*! Let those who perish, perish in *silence*!²¹⁵

During a period when the subjectivity of the middle-classes was being shaped by the poetical experiments of Wordsworth and the novels of Jane Austen, with the simultaneous development of an ideologically powerful apparatus of literary criticism from the bourgeois public sphere, Cobbett is here urging his audience to embrace an altogether different form of popular cultural resistance grounded in collective political action.

The Intellectual Politics of Radical Protest: T.J. Wooler's 'Peterloo Writings'

Cobbett's landmark address marked the beginning of a new strategy of plebeian intellectual praxis in the British public sphere, but in many respects his conspiratorial style of political radicalism was ill-suited to the needs of a larger movement for political and economic reform. For this new stage of radical mobilization a different intellectual strategy was required. This is where the unique counterpublicity of Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* emerges as a central cultural narrative in postwar intellectual radicalism.

Wooler founded the *Black Dwarf* in 1817 as a successor to the *Political Register* after Cobbett, fleeing another arrest by the government, had settled in the United States. Although the *Register* continued to be edited from abroad, Wooler felt the British Radical movement badly needed a London-based weekly to direct its activities. Much more so than Cobbett's *Political Register*, Wooler's *Black Dwarf* was seen by its editor as an explicit vehicle for the Radical political movement. From Henry 'Orator' Hunt and Major Cartwright to Francis Burdett, the *Black Dwarf* became a kind of mobile 'print assembly' for the leading voices of postwar radicalism, articulating a comprehensive vision of economic and political reform whilst carrying out basic organizational chores like the promotion of meetings. In the structure of its discourse the journal was also more directly an extension of the physical space of the plebeian public sphere than Cobbett's weekly. As an accomplished debater in the radical London taverns, Wooler had a highly developed rhetorical style that translated quite naturally into the cadence of his prose. Through the

rigour of frequent verbal conflict in the radical taverns, he also developed a characteristically combative critical voice that thrived on issues of public controversy. Wooler was in many respects the perfect intellectual tribune for the political crisis precipitated by the Manchester yeomanry in August 1819. While lacking the depth of Cobbett's social and cultural analysis, his writings in the *Black Dwarf* exhibited a sense of political timing that far surpassed the plebeian sage's often blunt articulations of moral outrage in the *Political Register*. Wooler would need all of his organizational and rhetorical skills to combat the range of state measures implemented to repress the activities of the radical public. From the Combination Act's official proscription of public gatherings to the Stamp Act's 'taxes on knowledge', the plebeian public sphere was forced to reclaim its public voice in direct assemblies of organized protest. Due to a tragic chain of events surrounding one particular gathering in St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, in the summer of 1819, this attempt to reclaim their cultural lifeworld would become a defining symbolic episode in the cultural history of Romantic period radicalism.

It is important to view the tragic events that made Peterloo such an important date in the radical martyrology of the nineteenth century as the culmination of a unique form of plebeian praxis. At the time of Peterloo the agenda of 'open constitutionalism' pursued by Wooler and Henry Hunt was, according to E.P. Thompson, 'proving more revolutionary in its implication than the policy of conspiracy and insurrection'.²¹⁶ The model for this form of open constitutionalism was the Spa Fields meetings of 1816-17. Organized by Hunt, these gatherings became symbolic expressions of a wider community solidarity within the Radical movement, articulating still powerfully residual elements of the plebeian cultural lifeworld. They were peaceful, disciplined formations in which working-class crowds, attired 'in their Sunday best', attempted to shame their opponents with collective displays of public dignity. The flexible structure of these meetings reflected the wider heterogeneity of the Radical movement (which by this time had included the petitioners of the provincial Hampden Clubs), as well as their ambiguous legality within the repressive

confines set by the government of the day. The labour historian John Belchem has commented on how this open structure also connected with a continuous tradition of popular protest in England: 'Open and inclusive in procedure and programme, the mass platform deliberately exploited ambiguities in the law and constitution, drawing upon the emotive rhetoric of popular constitutionalism and "people's history".'²¹⁷ Indeed, this format pioneered by Hunt at Spa Fields, as Belchem suggests, 'continued to inform radical agitation throughout the age of the Chartists'.²¹⁸

This strategy of direct action in favour of broad constitutional rights enacted by radical leaders like Hunt and Wooler presents a material historical example of the Habermasian concept of communicative praxis. As the critical theorist Agnes Heller argues, the idea of communicative action through rational discourse must always include the demonstrations of struggle that occur in pursuit of that normative aim: 'Action is communication, class struggle *and* enlightenment occur at the same time, not only because the slogans of protesters can trigger enlightenment processes, but because the conscious aim of action is (at least partially) an enlightenment process which will counterbalance the distorted communication of the media.'²¹⁹ Facing an openly hostile establishment press that routinely caricatured their methods whilst at the same time rubbishing their aims, these mass expressions of cultural praxis in the plebeian public sphere materialized the abstractions inherent in the Habermasian notion of communicative action. Heller suggests that in such situations, mass demonstration becomes a key expression of communicative action: 'The more mass demonstrations there are, the more counter-institutions and counter-movements express universalistic (mostly radical) needs, the greater the chances for progress through rational discourse...'²²⁰ Far from surrendering the ideals of democracy to their bourgeois rivals, the plebeian radicals through their actions forcefully articulated the concrete aspects of political, social and economic justice that radical democracy promised.

The most provocative single action of the 'open constitutionalist' strategy was the election at Birmingham in July 1819 of Sir Charles Wolseley as 'legislative attorney' for

the reformers. His role was to represent the grievances of the reform movement directly to the House of Commons. Instead of inviting Wolseley to Westminster for negotiations, the Government promptly arrested the leading organizers of this radical gesture, including Wooler. As a result of this Wooler was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment in Warwick gaol. As so often happened during these years, this legal maneuver by the authorities merely spurred the Radical movement to more ambitious demonstrations of popular sovereignty. Talk soon started of a full-blown National Convention of Radical activists. This would be the ultimate act of 'open constitutionalism', challenging the very political legitimacy of Parliament itself. An enormous popular rally was planned in Manchester to demonstrate the continuing popularity of the movement for reform. These events set the immediate political context for the dramatic scenes of protest and violent repression at St. Peter's Fields on August 16th.

A principal conduit for the preparations of the Manchester rally was Wooler's *Black Dwarf*. In the week leading up to the demonstrations, Wooler gave a detailed defence of why the meeting had to be postponed from its original date of August 10. With richly suggestive imagery that would characterize Wooler's Peterloo writings as a whole, he informs his audience that the anticipation of violence on the part of the local authorities had been the chief reason for the postponement: 'Every demoniac agent of the system seemed as eager as a vulture in quest of the blood which he hoped would flow; and the plunder that would ensue... What a day of rejoicing did the harpies anticipate for the ensuing day. The tenth of August would have been a perpetual jubilee, to celebrate the massacre at St. Peter's Church!'²²¹ The voluntary postponement was meant as a symbolic gesture of restraint on the part of the Radical movement, as Wooler suggests with sarcasm: 'But the *calm reason* of the *violent radical* reformers has again disappointed them. The troops may march quietly back to their respective barracks—the reformers are *not quite ready* to be cut to pieces.'²²² The reputation for mass discipline in the movement was a great source of pride to leaders like Wooler and had been tested severely in previous open air meetings, most notably at

Spa Field's two years earlier. In this article Wooler is at pains to emphasize to his readers and listeners, both in the plebeian public sphere and beyond it, that the labouring classes would always strive to be a dignified agent of political change in their collective action: 'The good sense of the immense bodies of people who assemble in the cause of reform absolutely maddens their enemies into the grossest folly. They cannot conceive how tens of thousands of the lower orders can meet together, deliberate dispassionately on the most important subjects, and quietly disperse without breaking their own heads, or their neighbors houses.'²²³ As these kinds of public gatherings were at the heart of Radical political strategy, it was important to send the message here that it was the movement, and not the authorities, that ultimately exerted control over the specific time and place of the meeting. As Wooler put it, 'the sovereignty of the people consists only of the assemblies of the people'.²²⁴

In his article the following week Wooler outlines the primary reasons behind the scheduled meeting in Manchester, and in the process passionately articulates the case for radical reform.²²⁵ With reference to his arrest, along with Major Cartwright and three others, for the symbolic July election of Sir Charles Wolseley as the 'attorney general' for the reformers, Wooler suggests that the time has come for a concrete act of collective action against the 'Boroughmongers': 'The result *convinced* every inquirer that something ought to be done. It was no longer *a vague idea*, an unfounded supposition, that the nation was robbed, and that the *boroughmongers* were the *robbers*, and the sinecurists and overpaid placemen and pensioners, were the *receivers* of the *stolen goods*.'²²⁶ Like Cobbett before him, Wooler was able to effectively materialize for his readers the results of systemic corruption in the political system, thus establishing a link between their economic salvation and the wider cause of radical reform. For Wooler, the legal persecution of the Radicals after the Birmingham meeting was a clear message from the Government that this legal pillaging would continue unless effectively confronted: 'The movement of the reformers at Birmingham, and the impulse which that movement gave to the cause of reform in every

other quarter, shewed the necessity of some counteracting evolution.'²²⁷ Wooler is here indicating both the necessity and the urgency for radical counterpublicity and public demonstrations to combat the accelerating tactics of persecution used by the authorities. The election of Wolseley was a turning point for the movement because it 'called upon the boroughmongers to admit the representative of Birmingham, or to pronounce the inhabitants of Birmingham *mere slaves*'.²²⁸ Wooler ends the article with a call for the reformers to vindicate the 'many generous sacrifices...made in other days' if they 'dare aspire to the glory of being free'.²²⁹

As we can see from these pre-Peterloo articles, Wooler was adept at using the rhetorical tools of the orator to rouse his audience to political action. The articles he published over the next three weeks in the *Black Dwarf* display equal gifts for dramatic reportage, satirical outrage and—perhaps most crucially—strategic insight, and taken together represent an imaginative intellectual response to the brutal repression meted out to the reformers at St. Peter's Fields. It might be helpful to pause here for a moment to appreciate the scale of the political spectacle that became the Peterloo massacre. The sight of a crowd of between sixty and one hundred thousand gathering on the fields in front of St. Peter's Church terrified the authorities, the more so for its disciplined formation. This fear displayed by the Yeomanry and the rest of the middle-class establishment of Manchester was, argues E.P. Thompson, 'evoked by the evidence of the translation of the rabble into a disciplined class'.²³⁰ Indeed, Thompson describes the brutal overreaction by the authorities as being prompted primarily by the 'panic of class hatred'.²³¹ The violence that resulted from this clash of establishment fear and plebeian defiance caused eleven deaths and over four hundred injuries.²³² Over a hundred of these injuries were sustained by women and children. In terms of its immediate psychological impact and long-term repercussions, Peterloo 'was without question a formative experience in British political and social history'.²³³ The role played by Wooler's campaign of counterpublicity in the *Black Dwarf* cannot be underestimated when considering the overall impact of these events

on the expansion of the radical public sphere in Britain. The 'Peterloo massacre' of popular radical myth in the 1820s was in many respects Wooler's Peterloo.

For satirical purposes as much as legal necessity, Wooler uses that staple genre of radical plebeian discourse, the letter, to communicate his nightmarish vision of Peterloo. In the persona of the 'Black Dwarf' of London writing to the 'Yellow Bronze' in Japan, Wooler mimics the style of popular gothic melodrama to introduce his Eastern correspondent to these shocking events in England. 'I am, my friend, petrified with horror and disgust', he begins, 'I am awaked, as from a frightful dream, and I find myself surrounded with a sea of blood, in which are floating mangled carcasses, and mutilated limbs.'²³⁴ This dramatic opening signals Wooler's attempt in the article to create an evocative atmosphere of moral despair for readers not present at the events. The imagery used also suggests an overriding desire to shock presented in the form of 'eyewitness' testimony. Wooler writes: 'Blood, innocent blood has been wantonly shed. The drought of the season has been allayed at Manchester by a shower of gore. The dogs have been fed with human blood; and the desolation of war has been exhibited in what was called a period of peace.'²³⁵ Jon Klancher has suggested that this focus on corporeal destruction was Wooler's way of confronting the state violence inflicted on his radical audience in the plebeian public sphere: 'Peterloo calls forth dire representations of the destruction of one's own readership, for those gathered at St. Peter's Fields formed the core of Wooler's public, who would now read about themselves shattered by the physical force of a potent ancien régime.'²³⁶ Recounting the events of the massacre in a shocked tone that he invites his readers to share, Wooler transforms the confrontation into a vivid morality play of good against evil: 'An immense assembly of men, women and children were congregated together, on the subject of their sufferings and their wrongs. Shall I be believed, when I tell thee, that a ferocious company of armed men, rushed with sabres upon this assembly, and commenced the work of indiscriminate slaughter!'²³⁷ With these words the already dramatic political conflict in Manchester between reformers and yeomanry becomes an

apocalyptic class struggle for the soul of the nation. This is the language of political crisis; an alarm call expressly designed to rally immediate support to the cause of radical reform.

Ever the political didact, Wooler portrays the character of the boroughmonger as the supreme villain of the scene. He describes this 'monster' to his audience as an entity that 'far surpasses in voracity and rapacious guilt, any thing thou hast heard, or read of, in ancient and modern history'.²³⁸ Wooler continues: 'It has often drank blood in *secret*, and fed upon the *tears* and *sighs* of its victims, when it could only incarcerate them in its horrible dens. But the thing has become braver. It has been driven to the courage of despair; and being on the eve of capture, trial, and conviction, it has rushed out of its cell at noon-day, and torn to pieces all that came within its grasp!'²³⁹ This kind of language returns radical plebeian satire to the genre's historical origins as a potent device of 'symbolic violence' against a powerful oppressor.²⁴⁰ Towards the end of the letter Wooler initiates the martyrdom of the victims for the larger mythology of radical sacrifice: 'All the causes of suffering, the names of the individuals attacked and maimed, should be collected, and a pretty little book compiled, to keep in memory for ever the bloody transactions of the day.'²⁴¹ In his role here as intellectual tribune and political propagandist Wooler was moving to chronicle the events at St. Peter's Fields for use in some future radical canon, while also attempting to morally isolate the Government and their agents in the local Yeomanry. He would turn his attention to the corrupt judicial system in his next article for the *Black Dwarf*.

The 'Letter of The Black Dwarf' published a week later, and some two weeks after the events of Peterloo, marked the beginning of a new critical strategy for Wooler. The urgent language of gothic melodrama of the previous week was ditched in favour of the sneering derision of farce. Wooler headlined the article in the style of a theatrical advertisement, highlighting in bold print 'MANCHESTER TRAGEDY, A HORRIBLE FARCE'. His opening signals this change of critical strategy: 'I gave thee, in my last, a few details of the scenes of one of the most *horrible tragedies* thy imagination could

conceive. Wouldst thou believe it, this tragedy has become a very *farce*...' ²⁴² The Yeomanry are transformed into the pathetic 'servants to the system' and the Prince Regent into 'his satanic majesty'. ²⁴³ Wooler's satirical ire has now shifted to the judiciary, a territory he was well acquainted with after two stints in gaol and several high profile public legal battles. He boasts that the Manchester magistrates 'would not even make good scare-crows, for the birds would chirrup in their faces' and sneers that like 'conceited actors, they have imagined themselves capable of playing every character in the drama of corruption, from the common thief-taker to the state executioner'. ²⁴⁴ This is language deliberately constructed to strip both the sense of dignity, as well as the moral legitimacy, from a legal system that was attempting to scapegoat the Radicals for the violence, in particular their leader Henry Hunt.

As in his previous article, Wooler sets up another morality play, this time consisting of a farcical encounter between Radical hero Henry Hunt and the hapless legal system he confronts in open court. Wooler paints the events surrounding Hunt's trial for treason as a symbolic move by the Government to frighten the Radical movement: 'The Manchester magistrates posted up to his Majesty's ministers; and daily consultations were held about the best means of hanging half a dozen reformers for high treason, just as a kind warning to the rest of the species.' ²⁴⁵ A large part of the Government's prosecution of Hunt was based upon the pretext that the iconography used by the Radicals in their flags and banners constituted an incitement to violence. This tactic provided an ideal opening for Wooler. 'The proofs of high treason,' he declares, 'was a *black flag* and a *bloody dagger*!' ²⁴⁶ With barely concealed outrage, Wooler continues: 'Yes, my yellow friend, this *bloody dagger*, this *emblem of treason*—this proof of *high treason*—was the sword of justice painted on a flag, as held by the hand of the goddess.' ²⁴⁷ By choosing this tack, Wooler is refiguring the political conflict between the state and the reformers into a moral battle over symbolic representations of justice. He argues that the authorities, by prosecuting Hunt and the other Radicals on the basis of their use of these symbols of freedom, have betrayed the popular

traditions of British liberty: 'This *bloody dagger* was not, however, on the *black flag*, that bore the inscription of "LIBERTY OR DEATH!" once this was the motto of EVERY BRITON—it was the song of the poet—the boast of the sage.'²⁴⁸ In a brilliant rhetorical move that both isolates the legal system as a culturally alien institution and appropriates these symbols of justice and freedom for the Radical movement, Wooler asserts to his audience that this 'sentiment, cherished for ages by the wise, the good, and the brave, is now become the emblem of revolt—the call for revolution!'²⁴⁹ In the rest of the opening Wooler continues to reinforce this opposition between a corrupt and repressive regime and a heroic Radical movement working in the best national traditions of freedom and justice.

In the second half of the article Wooler details the Manchester show trial of Hunt with gleeful sarcasm. He begins his 'reporting' with a bitter observation on the workings of the provincial judicial system: 'An English court of justice is an open Fair, where law is sold instead of justice; and where the best customers get the best served, and attended to first. But an English bench of country magistrates is a sort of justice-booth, in a corner of the fair, where neither justice nor law are to be obtained, either with money, or without money.'²⁵⁰ He continues: '*Interest, folly, and prejudice* are the tutelary deities of the place, and common-sense must not intrude, or she would be committed as a vagrant, and passed to any one who would take her in.'²⁵¹ This appeal to the common sense of his audience frames the rest of this 'report', where witness after witness called in to support the Government's case is exposed as a biased servant of the system protected from answering Hunt's simple queries of cross examination by an overzealous Chairman.

However, Wooler's most damning indictment of the judicial system is not based on these abuses of the provincial courtroom. At the end of his report he describes the presence of a 'pale, emaciated' prisoner called, appropriately enough, Elizabeth Gaunt. He informs the reader to 'Prepare thyself for the marvellous', and adds that 'whilst thine eyes are moistened with the tear of pity for the sufferings of a woman, swear with me an eternal hatred of the system which has nourished such brutes into life as her barbarous

oppressors!’²⁵² Wooler describes the pathetic figure as ‘almost fainting from weakness, in consequence of the wounds which she had received at the meeting, and her subsequent solitary confinement’.²⁵³ With an exasperation he invites his readers to share, Wooler writes of Hunt’s ‘astonishment’ at the immorality of a system which holds a prisoner in solitary confinement for twelve days, with no evidence of wrongdoing. By ending the report with this scene, Wooler again proves himself a master of moral symbolism. He compresses into this pitiful victim of Peterloo all the injustice and immorality of the affair, and by doing so universalizes the naked violence inflicted by the state upon any of those who dare to unite in peaceful protest against it. Describing the arrest of the woman by the ‘heroic’ yeomanry, Wooler lets rip his bitter sarcasm:

Falstaff’s courage, when he dared to give the dead Hotspur ‘another gash in his thigh,’ was nothing to the courage of this Manchester Yeomanry hero! or, maybe, there were more than one, who struck their glorious sabres in the fainting body of a woman senseless through fear! as a medal is to be struck to commemorate the honours of the Peter-loo massacre, this exploit will form an admirable reverse: and appropriate justice be done, the front of the medal will bear a gibbet adorned with the Yeomanry man who so far excelled his fellows!²⁵⁴

Thus the figure of a gallows is suggested by Wooler as the most appropriate commemoration of the state’s actions in Manchester on August 16th. In the popular culture of the radical underground, this symbolic subversion of the official account—much like Wooler’s ironic conflation ‘Peter-loo’—would have a powerful satirical resonance. Indeed, in an ironic print by George Cruikshank published in 1819 commemorating the Peterloo events, just such a scene is depicted above the ironic caption ‘Victory of Peterloo’.²⁵⁵

In his next article published on September 8th, Wooler switches his critical voice to that of the Radical orator to counsel his readers about pressing strategic issues. Reflecting the central role of the *Black Dwarf* in Radical assemblies all over the country, Wooler opens with a direct address to his audience about the tactical lessons to be learned from the events in Manchester: ‘As the sword has been drawn against reform, and the only answer

to our prayers has been brutal force, or shameful insults, it is useless for us to *expect* anything we cannot demand. We must collect and unite our scattered forces; and endeavour to marshal our strength, to be prepared for any result. There is no hope for us, but in our own exertions.’²⁵⁶ This is ‘directed’ journalism designed for use in meetings and gatherings of like-minded radicals. A shared political aim and the collective means to achieving it are reflected in the voice and tone of the ‘speaker’. Wooler’s main purpose here is to prepare his audience for the necessary struggles that lay ahead: ‘Now it is evident that those who oppress us, are determined to continue their oppression, until we can strike the falchion out of their hands, and protect ourselves against the threatened slaughter.’²⁵⁷

What form this ‘protection’ should take would be interpreted by Wooler’s contemporary audience in a number of ways, depending on the particular location and political inclination of the gathering. Spencean ultra-radicals, for example, would take this warning by the most influential radical journalist in Britain (with Cobbett still in exile) to mean actual physical acts of violence against the state similar to the actions later attempted by the Cato Street conspirators. However, the dominant strain of postwar radicalism, even after the brutal provocation of Peterloo, was still devoted to the open constitutionalist principles championed by Wooler, Cartwright and Hunt. For this sizable section of the Radical public it would be the expansion of the radical reading societies that would best promote the cause of reform. There is some evidence that this strategy succeeded. During this period the Radical message of ‘Order, Spirit, and Unanimity’ reached into areas previously untouched by the London-based plebeian public sphere, with miners in the industrial North taking to wearing copies of the *Black Dwarf* in their hat-crowns as the number of clubs in the region taking the journal grew noticeably.²⁵⁸ However, this essentially cultural form of plebeian resistance to the physical violence of the state did not mean that an ethic of unqualified pacifism predominated. After Peterloo, many in the movement took Wooler’s assertion in the article seriously that they had an ‘undoubted

right, to defend their meeting', and new measures were taken to protect open meetings with such makeshift implements as pikes and staves.²⁵⁹

Later in the article Wooler asks his audience 'how are we to alter this mischievous state of things, and introduce a more healthy order?'²⁶⁰ In his answer to this fundamental aspiration of the Radical project, he suggests that it can be achieved only through 'a great, a continued, and a united effort' facilitated by the demystifying force of counterpublicity.²⁶¹ This renewed project of counterpublicity must make the people aware of their collective interests as a class through the exposure of the enemies of those interests. He writes: 'We shall endeavour to obtain a list of all the boroughmongers, of all the regular traffickers in our liberties, and to inform the people at large to whom they are *indebted* for their slavery, and the plunder to which they are subjected.'²⁶² As part of this effort Wooler expresses a faith in the power of sustained argument that would surprise many of his ideological opponents in the bourgeois public sphere. In a passage ripe with Habermasian notions of communicative praxis, Wooler writes:

Truth is too fascinating to be rejected when constantly offered to the mind, in its real garb. We fear no diligence on the other side—they dare not meet the argument against which they have foolishly directed the sword. We have the justice of the case in our hands. This is evident, for our antagonists have had recourse to violence. The *progress of discussion* must therefore advance our cause.²⁶³

As a complement to this strategy, he proposes a plan of economic self-sufficiency similar to Cobbett's: 'LET US ATTACK THE REVENUE, in all its details, by abstaining as much as possible from all the articles upon which it feeds.'²⁶⁴ It is this pragmatic fusion of popular intellectual and material aims that ultimately defines Wooler's plan for an effective oppositional praxis after Peterloo.

It is fitting to end this consideration of Wooler's Peterloo writings with his message of hopeful intellectual opposition. Throughout these intellectual documents of plebeian resistance Wooler utilized all the rhetorical weapons at his disposal to encourage in the nascent British working class a sense of its own independent political agency in the public

sphere. These writings show the cultural power political crisis can generate when effectively channelled by an intellectual in touch with the collective psychological needs of his public. In response to the unprecedented violence of the state, their author developed new strategies of intellectual and cultural opposition. In the words of Kevin Gilmartin, Wooler 'recovered radical significance from the fragmentary meanings that government repression left in its wake'.²⁶⁵ In the end it was the power of the statute rather than the sword that helped to quell this form of intellectual opposition in the plebeian public sphere. As Ian Haywood has observed, the passage of the Six Acts in December 1819 finally 'severed the organic link between mass radical activity and radical journalism'.²⁶⁶ This legal clampdown on political activities forced a new strategy of plebeian intellectual praxis in the public sphere. By the time the *Black Dwarf* finally shut down its operations in 1824, a unique project of materialist social criticism was already well underway in the *Political Register*. According to E.P. Thompson, in Cobbett's article series collected as *Rural Rides*, 'his genius seems at last to have found its inevitable form and matter'.²⁶⁷

Cobbett's Cultural Geography of Resistance: The 'Materialist Arcadianism' of *Rural Rides*

In his highly sophisticated reading of Cobbett's article series, Kevin Gilmartin locates the essence of this new form of plebeian intellectual activism in the 1820s. In his travels through the countryside in the South of England Cobbett embarked upon a 'search for evidence' with the aim to 'describe and account for a corrupt system that already existed, in order to elicit its contradictions and encourage the popular resentment that would hasten its downfall'.²⁶⁸ This interpretation of Cobbett's 'literary' practice in the collection stands as the best recent summation of the plebeian intellectual project of the early nineteenth century. Far from being an exercise in politically quietest pastoralism, *Rural Rides* was for Cobbett an earnest attempt to educate his readership not only about the vanishing agrarian economy and the cultural lifeworld it sustained, but the political reasons for its eclipse by the parasitic new forces of wealth accumulation developed in the 'Great Wen'. Gilmartin argues that in

Cobbett's frenetic, outraged prose, 'Elements of the English countryside gathered political force because they were embedded in a process of self-destruction'.²⁶⁹ It is in this sense that Cobbett's physical and literary journey into the heart of Old England becomes a pioneering effort in radical materialist cultural criticism. This was a discourse trumpeting the social crisis in the countryside to a readership in the plebeian public sphere which Cobbett still felt was capable of effective political opposition.

The fundamental imbalance in the early nineteenth century between a developing urban economy based on the new wealth of speculative finance and a declining agrarian one was an example of what the Marxist cultural geographer David Harvey has called the 'theory of uneven geographical development'.²⁷⁰ Harvey describes this theory as an attempt to grasp the various social forces 'that are omnipresent within but not confined to the long history of capitalist commodity culture and its spatio-temporal dynamics'.²⁷¹ From this theoretical perspective Cobbett's *Rural Rides* can be understood as a unique example of Romantic period human geography in which the critic was attempting to locate for his readers the forces 'constructing historical-geographical legacies, cultural forms, and distinctive ways of life'.²⁷² For Harvey it is the uneven geographical development of late twentieth-century capitalism that has created the tensions between the many micro-communities that make up the system, and the larger macroeconomic imperatives of globalization. I argue that Cobbett was confronting a similar disjunction in the world's first industrial capitalist power, where an embattled plebeian lifeworld in the English countryside was experiencing the full force of a colonizing and culturally alien system of political economy.

The immediate economic context of Cobbett's literary journey is essential to understanding the wider implications it held for a new radical materialist practice of social criticism. After returning from his second political exile in America, Cobbett wanted to see first-hand how much the agrarian culture of 'Olde England' had changed under the cumulative weight of postwar deflation, excessive taxation, mass unemployment, and

depopulation. This was a time when the entire structure of labour relations in the countryside was being transformed by measures like the Corn Law of 1815. The new statute protected the landowners but forced many labourers into a permanent relationship of dependence, just when cuts in Poor Law relief were being implemented. Equally debilitating to the material welfare of the rural labourer was the inevitable transition to an industrial manufacturing economy and the attendant demands of bankers and financiers on agricultural production. As the social composition of the 'Captain Swing' revolt of 1830 displayed, the economic role of village artisans like blacksmiths, carpenters and wheelwrights was also threatened by the new forces of production.²⁷³ *Rural Rides* was thus partly an attempt to trace the social cost inflicted on the English countryside by the ideologically ascendant discourse of liberal political economy. Indeed, it is Cobbett's privileging of material human experience over the abstractions of the new commercial economy championed by journals like the *Edinburgh Review* that gives *Rural Rides* its power as a cultural counter-narrative directed against the relentless capitalist expansion occurring in the countryside.

The text, originally published as a series of articles in the *Political Register* from 1822-6, best represents Cobbett's descriptive powers as a critic of the changing patterns of social relations in the English countryside, as well as his steadfast faith in the possibilities of radical reform. For Cobbett the causes of rural suffering in the 1820s were first and foremost political; and hence required an essentially political response. *Rural Rides* was also the continuation of an effort by Cobbett to encourage alternative methods of rural development. Some two years earlier Cobbett had embarked upon a pamphlet series called *Cottage Economy* (1822) to provide the rural small-holder with a clearly written blueprint for economic self-sufficiency.²⁷⁴ We should view *Rural Rides* as the companion to this earlier volume, outlining in passionate expository prose the physical dis-equilibrium that the countryside was suffering under, while also pointing to a different vision of economic relations based on communitarian values.

Rural Rides expressed the plebeian Radical belief that it 'was political not economic agents who were central to labour's impoverishment'.²⁷⁵ Noel Thompson has emphasized the particular political focus of this kind of materialist cultural criticism: 'The exploiters of labour were fundholders, taxeaters, sinecurists, placemen, borough tyrants, and it was the place they occupied in the corrupt political system that gave them the power to impose their exactions on labour... the solutions to labour's material distress lay in the political sphere.'²⁷⁶ Clarifying this key tenet of plebeian Radicalism in his travels around the depressed agricultural areas of the south, Cobbett sought to link the material distress of the labouring classes with the larger political apparatus of exploitation directed from the capital. This was an articulation of class conflict rooted in a distinctly pre-Marxian conception of economic forces. Like Wooler, Cobbett felt the extension of political agency to the labouring classes would be the key to transforming their social and economic condition.

The dominant pattern of description in *Rural Rides* highlights Cobbett's dual intellectual role as both a careful observer of, and passionate polemicist on, rural England's tortured transition to capitalist modernity. In this form of cultural criticism there was no distinction between empirical social description and the larger political effort to transform what is being observed. An illustration of this can be found in an early installment from *Rural Rides* of September 1822. In it Cobbett relates his discovery of a group of day labourers working on the construction of a road in a parish at Wreckelsham, the apparent victims of seasonal agricultural unemployment. He writes: 'I call upon mankind to witness this scene, and to say, whether ever the like of this was heard of before. It is a state of things, where all is out of order; where self-preservation, that great law of nature, seems to be set at defiance; for here are farmers unable to pay men for working for them in doing that which is really of no use to any human being... You see a hundred things in the neighboring fields that want doing.'²⁷⁷ In this account of labourers at work in a distressed agricultural area a powerful sense of outrage is evoked at the political repression and corrupt fiscal management Cobbett feels are the primary causes of this rural dislocation.

Characteristically personalizing his critique to the figure of the Tory Foreign Secretary George Canning, Cobbett asks a series of questions aimed at exposing the logic behind the new economic policies being enacted in the countryside: 'Is this Mr Canning's "Sun of Prosperity"? Is this the way to increase or preserve a nation's wealth? Is this a sign of wise legislation and of good government? Does this thing "work well," Mr Canning? Does it prove, that we want no change?'²⁷⁸ He goes on to castigate the effects of the Six Acts and vows 'with God's help, I will change it if I can'.²⁷⁹ Cobbett associates this seemingly unrelated scene of labourers employed at parish work with the notorious 1819 legislation that enabled magistrates to ban seditious assemblies, seize cheap periodicals, and search and harass any person deemed ideologically suspicious by the state. Thus the material injustice of the labourers is directly linked to the attempts by the state to stifle radical critique in the plebeian public sphere. The implication is that the means of social transformation are to be found in the many devices of political agitation repressed by the Six Acts.

Perhaps the most vivid indictment of the changing patterns of wealth accumulation in England was developed by Cobbett on a journey from outer London and Surrey to the farmlands of West Sussex in the summer of 1823. In this ride he locates the implicit class conflict promoted by the new system, arguing that the financial superstructure sustained by the national debt has served the needs of a parasitic new elite of industrial capitalists at the expense of the labouring masses: 'A national debt, and all the taxation and gambling belonging to it have a natural tendency to *draw wealth into great masses*. These masses produce a power of *congregating* manufacturers, and of making the many work at them, *for the gain of the few*. The taxing Government finds great convenience in these congregations.'²⁸⁰ For Cobbett the overall effect of this economic process on the delicate social equilibrium of the countryside is obvious:

The country people lose part of their natural employment. The women and children, who ought to provide a great part of the raiment, have nothing to do. The fields must have *men and boys*; but where there are men and boys there will be *women and girls*; and as the Lords of the Loom have now a set of *real*

slaves, by the means of whom they take away a great part of the employment of the countrywomen and girls, these must be kept by poor-rates in whatever degree they lose employment through the Lords of the Loom.²⁸¹

Under Cobbett's keen 'material gaze' here the complex logic of capitalist exploitation is made intelligible to ordinary workers. This was perhaps the most important part of the critical strategy employed in the *Rural Rides*.²⁸² Kevin Gilmartin has argued that this strategy was part of Cobbett's larger 'effort to find an unambiguous and incontrovertible language for radical parliamentary reform and its many subsidiary agendas'.²⁸³

In another passage from the same article, Cobbett continues with this effort to assess for his plebeian audience the material effects of the collusive system of political and financial corruption obtaining in the early nineteenth century. Surveying the demise of the rural gentry, independent farmers, and freeholders, as well as their corresponding family-based systems of ownership, Cobbett revives the economic populism from his earlier 'Perish Commerce!' and 'Paper Against Gold' articles. For him it was the new social elite of early nineteenth-century capitalism and their mysterious laws of financial speculation that were most responsible for the impoverishment of the working classes: '...this is the way our crew *beat* the people of France. They laid out, in the first place, *six hundred millions* which they borrowed, and for which they *mortgaged* the revenues of the nation. Then they contracted for a *dead weight* to the amount of *one hundred and fifty millions*. Then they stripped the *labouring classes* of the commons, of their kettles, their bedding, their beer-barrels; and in short, made them all paupers...'²⁸⁴ The straightforward causality Cobbett posits between wartime finance and rural impoverishment may seem simplistic and overstated to the modern observer, but to contemporary plebeian readers it provided a powerfully compelling basis for collective political action. It was also, in its own way, a foundational critique for the subsequent development of socialist thought in Britain, as the financial historian Niall Ferguson has argued.²⁸⁵

The symbolic interpretation of physical geography in Cobbett's travels reveals another aspect of the anti-capitalist intellectual praxis he was developing in *Rural Rides*. In

an installment from 1825 Cobbett comes across a stream in Whitchurch that powers a mill making Bank of England notes for mass circulation. He contemplates the absurd importance of this small stream in the rural South of England in relation to more famous bodies of water such as the Thames, Hudson, Nile and Ganges: ‘...what are all these rivers put together, compared with the river of Whitchurch, which a man of threescore may jump across dry-shod, which moistens a quarter of a mile wide of poor, rushy meadow, which washes the skirts of the park and game-preserves... and which is, to look at it, of far less importance than any gutter in the Wen!’²⁸⁶ By tracing the origins of the new financial system in this way, ‘using “materials” rather than reason or argument’, Cobbett was providing his audience with tangible physical representations of their economic oppression.²⁸⁷ He makes a simple and effective connection between the manufacture of bank notes by the mill and the material consequences of the system of speculative capitalism over the last fifty years. Cobbett argues that ‘by merely turning a wheel ... [the mill] has produced a greater effect on the condition of men, than has been produced on that condition by all the other rivers, all the seas, all the mines and all the continents in the world’.²⁸⁸ This is how Cobbett projects his political critique into the changing physical landscape of rural England in the *Rides*; for him a quiet stream comes to represent the related tyrannies of the paper-money system and the public debt, while workers laying out a road signify the absurd allocation of resources and manpower under a corrupt regime.²⁸⁹

In one of his last rides from August 1826 through the valley of Avon—‘my land of promise’ as he calls it—Cobbett strikes out against all those ideas and figures he sees as plaguing England in its transition to a more ‘developed’ economy.²⁹⁰ Absentee landlords, Scottish metaphysics, Malthusian theories of overpopulation, and the accompanying overproduction of foodstuffs for the rich are all cited as agents for the current material distresses affecting England’s agricultural heartland.²⁹¹ In one calculation of the material provisions for an average labourer’s family in the context of overall local food production, Cobbett decries the corrupt moral logic of an economic system that promotes simultaneous

surplus and deprivation: 'What an injustice, what a hellish system it must be, to make those who raise it *skin and bone and nakedness*, while the food and drink and wool are almost all carried away to be heaped on the fund-holders, pensioners, soldiers, dead-weight, and other swarms of tax eaters! If such an operation do not need putting an end to, then the devil himself is a saint.'²⁹² This critique of the distortions imposed upon local agricultural economies by the developing complexity of the commercial market leads Cobbett to advocate a rudimentary form of socialist co-operation between the various sections of the working class: 'If the over-produce of this Valley of Avon were given, by the farmers, to the weavers of Lancashire, to the iron and steel chaps of Warwickshire, and to other makers of all these useful things, there would come an abundance of all these useful things into this valley from Lancashire and other parts...'²⁹³ As this passage indicates, Cobbett actively encouraged collective economic values in the labouring classes, and felt the time had come to spread this message as part of the wider project for Radical reform. In doing so he was extending the popular education project he begun in his 'Paper Against Gold' series over a decade earlier with a new emphasis on the need for immediate political struggle.

In another passage from the same ride, Cobbett opposes the abstractions of Scottish political economy with an appeal to older cultural traditions of plebeian solidarity. With malicious humor he relates how the new measurements of wealth accumulation promoted by the 'system of the north' have undermined the traditional patterns of daily life for the workers:

The Scotch feelosophers...have an insuperable objection to all those establishments and customs which occasion holidays. They call them a great hindrance, a great bar to industry, a great draw-back from 'national wealth.' I wish each of these unfeeling fellows had a spade put into his hand for ten days, only ten days, and that he were compelled to dig only just as much as one of the common labourers of Fulham. The metaphysical gentleman would, I believe, soon discover the use of holidays!²⁹⁴

This appeal to the popular customary moral standards still familiar to a majority of rural labourers nicely illustrates the nature of this cultural conflict between a residual plebeian

community solidarity and an emergent discourse of bourgeois liberal economy. Cobbett is here recognizing an older moral economy being superseded by the ruthless utilitarian imperatives of the new commercial society. Craig Calhoun has argued that this social vision of Cobbett's was first and foremost an effort to clarify the right of workers 'to make commonsense of their communal experiences'.²⁹⁵ The older moral economy thus became a crucial gauge for workers to measure the present state of their exploitation. I would suggest that the normative power of this cultural tradition was a driving force behind plebeian radical discourse. Calhoun argues that plebeian cultural resistance was based upon powerfully persistent residual notions of community and tradition: 'It is because tradition was shaped in this way, by present experience as well as by "real" history, that populations of workers whose prosperity was of recent origin and dependent on industrialization and/or intensified capitalist commercialization could interpret their grievances in terms of the disruption of a traditional way of life.'²⁹⁶

The plebeian world-view Cobbett was articulating throughout *Rural Rides* is best described as kind of 'materialist Arcadianism'; a necessarily contradictory ideology that sought to highlight social suffering and the causes of that suffering in starkly material terms, as it also longed for a return to the moral certainties of England's vanishing pre-industrial civilization. This was Cobbett's version of the normative cultural vision that animated the writings of the two other radical intellectuals discussed in this chapter. From the agrarian utopianism of Spence to the radical libertarianism of Wooler, a common language of natural rights was used to express a belief in the values of community solidarity as the basis for an alternative social order. The project of radical plebeian cultural criticism engaged in by all three thinkers was an explicitly counter-hegemonic intellectual formation that attempted to overturn the contemporary capitalist social order in favour of its own morally superior narrative of collective emancipation.

Perhaps Cobbett stands out as the most ideologically contradictory figure of the group because of the pressures and expectations imposed by his unprecedented popular

following. Unlike the avant-garde underworld readership that received Spence's pamphlets and the dedicated political organization that surrounded Wooler's journalism, Cobbett's writing reached across the entire spectrum of the plebeian public sphere, from the rural village artisans and agricultural workers of the South to the emerging factory proletariat of the Midlands and North.²⁹⁷ It should be remembered that Cobbett successfully stood for election not in the rural South he portrayed in the first edition of *Rural Rides*, but in Oldham, a factory town in the North that epitomized the grim new social realities of industrialism. Although he may have promoted the agrarian ideals of Old England in much of his writing, Cobbett was shrewd enough politically to realize that the future of radical reform lay in the new industrial heartlands of the country. Indeed, Cobbett's many contradictory positions in *Rural Rides* — champion of medieval organicism and tribune of a radical political future; acerbic critic of social injustice as well as kindly observer of timeless rural traditions; pedantic quantifier of individual daily experience in the English countryside and passionate polemicist for an increasingly urban plebeian readership — were a reflection of this complex positionality as the most potent voice of radical opposition in the British public sphere at a crucially transitional moment in the development of industrial capitalism.

Rural Rides in many respects signalled the temporal and epistemological completion of the radical project of intellectual opposition, coming as it did (in its complete published form) at the end of the heroic period of plebeian agitation, as well as at the endpoint of Cobbett's distinctive — yet also in many ways representative — project of 'reactionary radicalism'. The year the collection was published witnessed perhaps the last collective articulation of this residual ideological formation. The 'Captain Swing' riots that erupted all over the South of England in 1830-1 were a vivid illustration of the plebeian class struggle Cobbett sought to spark with the polemical prose of *Rural Rides*. Indeed, Cobbett's legal persecution by the Government after the final defeat of the rural revolt was a powerful indication of the instrumental role played by the *Political Register* in this 'last great political movement in the country districts'.²⁹⁸ However, the political effects of *Rural*

Rides were not limited to cultural resistance in the English countryside. Cobbett's prose also resonated in the agitations of the major urban centres for the reform programme. This made the publication of *Rural Rides* both a timely contribution to immediate political struggles in urban industrial England, and a curious echo from an earlier formation of popular rural resistance.

It is often forgotten that the passage of the Reform Bill occurred during a period of extended economic depression in England, and the massive demonstrations of artisans and workers that preceded it in places like London and Birmingham—as well as the riots that broke out in Nottingham and Bristol—reflected a genuine popular outrage that the political establishment may yet bury the legislation.²⁹⁹ Cobbett's address 'To The Working People Of The Whole Of the United Kingdom', published in May 1831, was an attempt to remind the working classes that their material, as well as political, well-being was at stake during the debates over the Bill in Parliament.³⁰⁰ These key expressions of the popular will helped moderates like the then Lord Chancellor Henry Brougham to negotiate a compromise with the most intransigent Tories. At any rate, the final version of the Bill that secured passage was more a reflection of the commercial middle-class Whiggism of leaders like Brougham than the radical aspirations of Wooler or Cobbett.

The radical plebeian formation that these two men represented survived in only a residual form to agitate in the 1830s for a more complete political emancipation. As E.P. Thompson put it near the end of *The Making of the English Working Class*, 'There is a sense in which the Chartist movement commenced, not in 1836 with the promulgation of the "Six Points", but at the moment when the Reform Bill received Royal Assent.'³⁰¹ Unlike the essentially defensive and backward looking cultural politics of a plebeian public sphere represented by intellectuals like Cobbett, the Chartists looked to the future for their models of political and social emancipation. Indeed, it can be argued that the distinctive critical discourse of plebeian cultural radicalism traced in this chapter died in 1832, along with the last hopes for a genuine emancipation promised by the Reform Bill. The new

struggles for working-class liberation in the 1830s led by figures like William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor were the reflection of a different social base in the major cities and industrial communities, and utilized a correspondingly distinctive economic philosophy and critical vocabulary.³⁰² The language of empirical class analysis replaced the invocations of 'Old Corruption', and a new proletarian public sphere developed its own unique structures of radical protest.³⁰³

What this tradition of radical plebeian cultural politics did bequeath to the subsequent radical movements of the Victorian period and the twentieth century, however, was the sense—as Tom Steele suggested at the beginning of this chapter—of popular collective cultural struggle being wedded to a morally superior social vision. The economic arguments of the Chartists and socialists of the middle and later nineteenth century were clearly an advance upon the more emotive plebeian discourse of 'Old Corruption'. But in recognizing this strategic step forward, cultural historians should not overlook the way these later formations built upon the cultural politics of the plebeian public sphere to articulate their own projections of an ideal, alternative social order. It was from the ideological conflict with economic, political and intellectual elites initiated and sustained by radical critics like Spence, Cobbett and Wooler that a coherent sense of cultural opposition was established for use by radical popular movements later in the century. From the Chartists and socialists of the nineteenth century to the adult education tutors and cultural studies academics of the twentieth, an implicit belief was shared in the achievement of collective political emancipation through co-operative and coordinated intellectual activities.

NOTES

¹ Richard Johnson, “Really Useful Knowledge”, pp. 75-6.

² Johnson, “Really Useful Knowledge”, p. 76.

³ Johnson, “Really Useful Knowledge”, p. 76.

⁴ My contention that the organized spaces of plebeian radicalism served as prototypes for later projects of collective emancipation like workers’ education is neither new nor novel. Indeed, Brian Simon’s seminal study *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure*, makes direct connections between the institutions of radical discourse in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries like the Corresponding Societies and the Hampden Clubs, and the pedagogical practices of workers’ education movements. See Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure*, pp. 180-93.

⁵ Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-65: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997), p. 33.

⁶ Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies*, p. 33.

⁷ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 719.

⁸ Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, pp. 128-9. For a more nuanced interpretation of the Mechanics’ Institutes and their role in the popular education movement in the early nineteenth century see Harold Silver, *The Concept of Popular Education* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1965).

⁹ Kevin Gilmartin, ‘Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994), 549-57 (p. 553).

¹⁰ For a later attempt at a more formal explication of the plebeian counterpublic sphere concept see Gilmartin, ‘Introduction: Locating a Plebeian Counterpublic Sphere’, in *Print Politics*, pp. 1-10.

¹¹ Gilmartin, ‘Popular Radicalism and the Public Sphere’, p. 553.

¹² Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 100.

¹³ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 100.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 758.

¹⁵ An excellent anecdotal illustration of the mediating role of the adult education tutor has been given by Richard Hoggart. See Richard Hoggart, ‘The Role of the Teacher’, in *An English Temper: Essays on Education, Culture and Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-12.

¹⁶ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 103.

¹⁷ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 103.

¹⁸ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 104.

¹⁹ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 104.

²⁰ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 24.

²¹ Lyon, *Manifestoes*, p. 24.

²² Versions of both essays were originally published in the 1970s. 'Patricians and Plebs' first appeared as 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', in the *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974); and 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class', first appeared under the same title in *Social History*, 3 (1978). They were both extensively revised for *Customs in Common*.

²³ E.P. Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', in *Customs in Common* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 15-96 (p. 22).

²⁴ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 71.

²⁵ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 72.

²⁶ Thompson, *Customs in Common*, p. 72.

²⁷ Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. xii-xiii.

²⁸ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 4.

²⁹ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 15.

³⁰ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 8.

³¹ The social complexity of the early nineteenth century artisanate has been retraced by Iorwerth Prothero, challenging some of the assumptions of cultural holism attributed to this group by Thompson's narrative from *The Making of the English Working Class*. Prothero warns that it is dangerous to generalize about an economic formation that was so 'large, varied and changing'. It should be added that he also rejects such Thompsonian categories as the 'moral economy', 'pre-industrial society', and 'custom' in his more empirical analysis of the culture of the radical artisans. See Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 19. For a more extended discussion of Prothero's revisionist challenge to the dominant 'culturalist' narratives of British Marxist historiography, see my article, 'Nineteenth-Century Radical History After the Cultural Marxists', *The European Legacy*, 5 (2000), 415-19.

³² Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 7.

³³ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 37.

³⁴ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 37.

³⁵ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 38.

³⁶ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 18.

³⁷ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 23.

³⁸ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 27.

³⁹ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Gilmartin, *Pint Politics*, p. 59.

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- ⁴¹ See Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 6.
- ⁴² See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 18.
- ⁴³ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁴ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 22.
- ⁴⁵ David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992) p. 51.
- ⁴⁶ Thomas Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence for a political pamphlet entitled The Restorer of Society to its Natural State, on May 27th, 1801, at Westminster Hall, before Lord Kenyon and a special jury*, in *Pigs' Meat: Selected Writings of Thomas Spence, Radical and Pioneer Land Reformer*, ed. by G.I. Gallop (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1982), pp 127-65 (p. 141).
- ⁴⁷ Worrall, *Radical Culture*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁸ Worrall, *Radical Culture*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁹ Worrall, *Radical Culture*, p. 5.
- ⁵⁰ The full title of the 1775 lecture was 'On the Mode of Administering the Landed Estate of the Nation as a Joint Stock Property in Parochial Partnerships by Dividing Rent.' See Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man: Political Economies for the Working Class, 1775-1850* (London: Pluto, 1998), pp. 5-6.
- ⁵¹ Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, pp. 7-8.
- ⁵² Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 127.
- ⁵³ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 129.
- ⁵⁴ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 130.
- ⁵⁵ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 130.
- ⁵⁶ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 129.
- ⁵⁷ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 129.
- ⁵⁸ John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 33. For important studies of the cultural struggle with industrial economic disciplines see E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Customs in Common*, pp. 352-403; Eric Hobsbawm, 'Custom, Wages and Workload in Nineteenth-Century Industry', in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1964), pp. 344-370; Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); J.L. and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London: Longman and Green, 1911); A.J. Randall, *Before the Luddites: Custom, Community and Machinery in the English Woolen Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); A.L. Morton, 'The Triumph of Industrial Capitalism', in *A People's History of England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp. 311-38.
- ⁵⁹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 130.

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- ⁶⁰ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 131.
- ⁶¹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 131.
- ⁶² Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 131.
- ⁶³ Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, p. 11.
- ⁶⁴ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 133.
- ⁶⁵ See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 44.
- ⁶⁶ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 45.
- ⁶⁷ See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 204-19. For more detailed studies of the intersection between pornography, sexual libertinism and political dissidence in the period see McCalman's two articles, 'Females, Feminism and Freeloze in an Early Nineteenth-Century Radical Movement', *Labour History*, 38 (1980), 1-25; and 'Unspeakable Radicalism: Infidels and Pornography in Early Nineteenth-Century London', *Past and Present*, 104 (1984), 74-110.
- ⁶⁸ For an examination of the targeting of drinking by nineteenth-century moral paternalists as an attempt to integrate workers into the industrial economy, see E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Customs in Common*, pp. 376-77.
- ⁶⁹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 133.
- ⁷⁰ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 134.
- ⁷¹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 135.
- ⁷² Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 135.
- ⁷³ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 135.
- ⁷⁴ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 140.
- ⁷⁵ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 140.
- ⁷⁶ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 141.
- ⁷⁷ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 141.
- ⁷⁸ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 149. For the complete text of his 'Constitution of Spensonia', see *Pigs' Meat: Selected Writings of Thomas Spence*, pp. 166-84.
- ⁷⁹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 149.
- ⁸⁰ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 150.
- ⁸¹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 155.
- ⁸² This affinity between the Spencean critique of agrarian capitalism and Cobbett's 'political economy of Old Corruption' has been commented on by Leonora Nattrass in *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 28. Iain McCalman makes a counter-argument that focuses instead on the distinctive cultural contexts of each intellectual's formation, and places the Cobbettian and Spencean strains at opposite ends of the discourse of intellectual radicalism in the early nineteenth century. See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 127.

⁸³ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 158.

⁸⁴ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 25.

⁸⁵ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 161.

⁸⁶ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, pp. 161-62.

⁸⁷ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, pp. 161-62.

⁸⁸ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 162.

⁸⁹ Spence, *The Important Trial of Thomas Spence*, p. 162.

⁹⁰ See Daniel Green, *Great Cobbett: The Noblest Agitator* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 213.

⁹¹ William Cobbett, 'Advertisement', *Cobbett's Annual Register*, 1 (1802), Jan. to June.

⁹² See William Cobbett, 'To the Readers of the Register', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 31 (16 November 1816), 609-622 (p. 610). For price details see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 324; Green, *Great Cobbett*, pp. 213-15; and Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 101.

⁹³ See Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 206.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Karl W. Schweizer and John W. Osborne, *Cobbett In His Times* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), p. 5.

⁹⁵ See Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 5.

⁹⁶ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ For a study of the relationship between Cobbett's social vision and the rural popular culture of the time, see Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹⁸ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 121.

⁹⁹ See Schweizer and Osborne, *Cobbett in his Times*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 101.

¹⁰¹ See Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, p. 88.

¹⁰² Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 92.

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- ¹⁰³ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being an Examination of the Report of the Bullion Committee in a Series of Letters to the Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 20 (6 July 1811), 1-29 (p. 10).
- ¹⁰⁴ Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, p. 23.
- ¹⁰⁵ W.D. Rubenstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain: 1750-1990* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 142.
- ¹⁰⁶ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 113.
- ¹⁰⁷ Kevin Gilmartin, "'This Is Very Material": William Cobbett and the Rhetoric of Radical Opposition', *Studies in Romanticism*, 34 (1995), 81-103 (p. 96).
- ¹⁰⁸ See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 99.
- ¹⁰⁹ This has been commented on by Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 637.
- ¹¹⁰ See Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure*, pp. 186-87, for a description of the uses of Cobbett's texts in the Hampden Club gatherings. See McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 117, for the role of the *Political Register* in the postwar debating clubs of underground London.
- ¹¹¹ William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Two-Penny Trash; or Politics For The Poor* (London, 1831), p. 1.
- ¹¹² See Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 324.
- ¹¹³ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 758.
- ¹¹⁴ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-Class*, p. 758.
- ¹¹⁵ See Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 305.
- ¹¹⁶ See William Spence, *Britain Independent of Commerce; or Proofs deduced from an Investigation into the True Causes of the Wealth of Nations, that our Riches, Prosperity and Power are derived from Sources Inherent in Ourselves, and Would not be Affected even though our Commerce were Annihilated* (London, 1807).
- ¹¹⁷ See Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 364.
- ¹¹⁸ See T.R. Malthus, 'Spence on Commerce', *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (1808), 429-48; and James Mill, *Commerce Defended, an Answer to the Arguments by which Mr Spence, Mr Cobbett, and Others, have Attempted to Prove that Commerce is not a Source of National Wealth* (London, 1808).
- ¹¹⁹ See Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, p. 128.
- ¹²⁰ See Henry Brougham, 'Randolph and Others on the Neutral Question', *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (1807), 1-30; and 'Examination on the Late Orders in Council', *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (1808), 484-98.
- ¹²¹ Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 251.
- ¹²² William Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 12 (21 November 1807), 801-24 (p. 802).

¹²³ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 803.

¹²⁴ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 803.

¹²⁵ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 803.

¹²⁶ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 803.

¹²⁷ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 806.

¹²⁸ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 809.

¹²⁹ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 816.

¹³⁰ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 820.

¹³¹ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 822.

¹³² Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 821.

¹³³ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 823.

¹³⁴ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce!', p. 823.

¹³⁵ See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 799.

¹³⁶ William Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 12 (12 December 1807), 897-915 (p. 897).

¹³⁷ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 897.

¹³⁸ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 897.

¹³⁹ This anti-tax critique of Cobbett's was shared by a figure from an earlier formation of plebeian radicalism. Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society also singled out the punitive effects of taxation on the ordinary labourer's daily life. He decried 'the heavy pressure of the daily accumulating taxes, and the consequent rise in the prices of all the necessaries of life'. See Thomas Hardy, *Memoirs of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1832), p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 901.

¹⁴¹ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 901.

¹⁴² Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 901.

¹⁴³ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 902.

¹⁴⁴ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 912.

¹⁴⁵ See Morton, *A People's History of England*, p. 318.

¹⁴⁶ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 912.

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- ¹⁴⁷ William Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 13 (5 March 1808), 365-71 (p. 367).
- ¹⁴⁸ Cobbett, 'Perish Commerce', p. 367.
- ¹⁴⁹ Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, p. 28.
- ¹⁵⁰ Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 358.
- ¹⁵¹ See Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, p. 118.
- ¹⁵² Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society*, p. 123.
- ¹⁵³ Quoted in Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 359.
- ¹⁵⁴ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being An Examination Of The Report of the Bullion Committee: In A Series Of Letters To The Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury: Letter I', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 18 (1 September 1810), 258-69 (p. 259).
- ¹⁵⁵ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 260.
- ¹⁵⁶ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 260.
- ¹⁵⁷ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 261.
- ¹⁵⁸ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 261.
- ¹⁵⁹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 262.
- ¹⁶⁰ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 262.
- ¹⁶¹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 264.
- ¹⁶² Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 265.
- ¹⁶³ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 265.
- ¹⁶⁴ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter I', p. 265.
- ¹⁶⁵ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being An Examination Of The Report of the Bullion Committee: In A Series Of Letters To The Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury: Letter II,' *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 18 (8 September 1810), 289-97 (p. 290).
- ¹⁶⁶ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 291.
- ¹⁶⁷ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 291.
- ¹⁶⁸ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 294.
- ¹⁶⁹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 294.

¹⁷⁰ 'Muckworm' was popular shorthand for the figure of the City financier during the Napoleonic Wars. It was during this time that the wealthiest and best known bankers of the nineteenth century, the Rothschilds, made their fortune through the financing of government debt and the bullion trade. In England it was Nathan Rothschild, the first British millionaire of the century, who epitomized the figure of 'Muckworm'. See Niall Ferguson, *The House of Rothschild: Money's Prophets, 1798-1848* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 145.

¹⁷¹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 295.

¹⁷² Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 295.

¹⁷³ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 295.

¹⁷⁴ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 295.

¹⁷⁵ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 296.

¹⁷⁶ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter II', p. 296.

¹⁷⁷ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being An Examination Of The Report of the Bullion Committee: In A Series Of Letters To The Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury: Letter III', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 18 (12 September 1810), 321-33 (p. 323).

¹⁷⁸ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 323.

¹⁷⁹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 329.

¹⁸⁰ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 330.

¹⁸¹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 330.

¹⁸² Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 331-2.

¹⁸³ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 332.

¹⁸⁴ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 332.

¹⁸⁵ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter III', p. 332.

¹⁸⁶ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being An Examination Of The Report of the Bullion Committee: In A Series Of Letters To The Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury: Letter XI', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 18 (17 October 1810), 641-54 (p. 645).

¹⁸⁷ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XI', p. 645.

¹⁸⁸ William Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Being An Examination Of The Report of the Bullion Committee: In A Series Of Letters To The Tradesmen and Farmers In Or Near Salisbury: Letter XXV', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 20 (6 July 1811), 1-29 (p. 2).

¹⁸⁹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 3.

¹⁹¹ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', pp. 3-4.

¹⁹² See Niall Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p. 153.

¹⁹³ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 17.

¹⁹⁴ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 17.

¹⁹⁵ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 17.

¹⁹⁶ Cobbett, 'Paper Against Gold: Letter XXV', p. 17.

¹⁹⁷ Morton, *A People's History of England*, p. 318.

¹⁹⁸ Morton, *A People's History of England*, p. 318.

¹⁹⁹ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 99.

²⁰⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 674.

²⁰¹ See William Cobbett, 'To The Readers Of The Register', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 31 (16 November 1816), 610-622 (p. 622).

²⁰² William Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 31 (2 November 1816), 545-76 (pp. 545-6).

²⁰³ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 107.

²⁰⁴ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 546.

²⁰⁵ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 546.

²⁰⁶ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', pp. 546-7.

²⁰⁷ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 560.

²⁰⁸ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 559.

²⁰⁹ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 565.

²¹⁰ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 106.

²¹¹ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 569.

²¹² Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 569.

²¹³ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 569.

²¹⁴ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 569.

²¹⁵ Cobbett, 'To The Journeymen And Labourers Of England, Wales, Scotland And Ireland', p. 573.

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- ²¹⁶ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 682.
- ²¹⁷ John Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 42.
- ²¹⁸ Belchem, *Popular Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 42.
- ²¹⁹ Agnes Heller, 'Habermas and Marxism', in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, ed. by John B. Thompson and David Held (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 21-42 (p. 28).
- ²²⁰ Heller, 'Habermas and Marxism', p. 28.
- ²²¹ T.J. Wooler, 'Defence of the Manchester Meeting Advertised for the 9th Instant, Against the Foolish and Illegal Conduct of the Manchester Magistrates', *The Black Dwarf*, 3 (11 August 1819), 517-21 (p. 517).
- ²²² Wooler, 'Defence of the Manchester Meeting', p. 517.
- ²²³ Wooler, 'Defence of the Manchester Meeting', p. 517.
- ²²⁴ Wooler, 'Defence of the Manchester Meeting', p. 518.
- ²²⁵ Although dated August 18th, it is clear from the tone of the article that the events of Peterloo occurred after this issue went to press.
- ²²⁶ T.J. Wooler, 'The Trickery of the Indictment of Major Cartwright, and Messrs. Wooler, Edmonds, Maddocks and Lewis', *The Black Dwarf*, 3 (18 August 1819), 533-35 (p. 533).
- ²²⁷ Wooler, 'The Trickery of the Indictment of Major Cartwright', p. 534.
- ²²⁸ Wooler, 'The Trickery of the Indictment of Major Cartwright', p. 535.
- ²²⁹ Wooler, 'The Trickery of the Indictment of Major Cartwright', p. 535.
- ²³⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 682.
- ²³¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 686.
- ²³² See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 687.
- ²³³ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 687.
- ²³⁴ T.J. Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', *The Black Dwarf*, 3 (25 August 1819), 550-52 (p. 550).
- ²³⁵ Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', p. 550.
- ²³⁶ Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 118.
- ²³⁷ Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', p. 551.
- ²³⁸ Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', p. 551.
- ²³⁹ Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', p. 551

²⁴⁰ See Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 118.

²⁴¹ Wooler, 'From the Black Dwarf in London, to the Yellow Bronze at Japan', p. 552.

²⁴² T.J. Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', *The Black Dwarf*, 3 (1 September 1819), 565-75 (p. 565).

²⁴³ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 565.

²⁴⁴ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 565.

²⁴⁵ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 567.

²⁴⁶ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 567.

²⁴⁷ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 567.

²⁴⁸ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 567.

²⁴⁹ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 567.

²⁵⁰ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 569.

²⁵¹ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 569.

²⁵² Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 572.

²⁵³ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 572.

²⁵⁴ Wooler, 'Manchester Tragedy, A Horrible Farce', p. 572.

²⁵⁵ For a reproduction of Cruikshank's ironic 'monument' to Peterloo see the introduction to Kyle Grimes's hypertext edition of William Hone's *The Political House that Jack Built*, featured on the Romantic Circles website at <www.rc.umd.edu/editions/contemps/hone/intro.htm>.

²⁵⁶ T.J. Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire, as to the Real Authors of the Manchester Massacre!', *The Black Dwarf*, 3 (8 September 1819), 581-86 (p. 581).

²⁵⁷ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 581.

²⁵⁸ See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 690-1; p. 706.

²⁵⁹ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 582. See Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 691.

²⁶⁰ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 584.

²⁶¹ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 583.

²⁶² Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', pp. 583-4.

²⁶³ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 584.

²⁶⁴ Wooler, 'Hints to the Reformers of the British Empire', p. 584.

²⁶⁵ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 95.

²⁶⁶ Ian Haywood, 'Radical Journalism', in *Romantic Period Writings, 1798-1832: An Anthology*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Ian Haywood (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 6-12 (p. 12).

²⁶⁷ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 724.

²⁶⁸ See Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 159; p. 189.

²⁶⁹ Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 189.

²⁷⁰ See David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p. 74.

²⁷¹ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 74.

²⁷² Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 74.

²⁷³ See Morton, *A People's History of England*, p. 318; Hobsbawm and Rudé, *Captain Swing*, pp. 34-48.

²⁷⁴ See William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

²⁷⁵ Noel Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, p. 26.

²⁷⁶ Thompson, *The Real Rights of Man*, p. 26.

²⁷⁷ William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. by George Woodcock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 42.

²⁷⁸ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 42.

²⁷⁹ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 42.

²⁸⁰ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 117.

²⁸¹ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, pp. 117-18.

²⁸² The term 'material gaze' is taken from Gilmartin's article, "'This Is Very Material': William Cobbett and the Rhetoric of Radical Opposition", p. 83.

²⁸³ Gilmartin, "'This Is Very Material'", p. 82.

²⁸⁴ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 121.

²⁸⁵ See Ferguson, *The Cash Nexus*, p. 201. This view is also shared by Stanley Pierson, who suggests that the reception of Marxist ideas in Britain through figures like Henry Hyndman was filtered through this earlier tradition of radicalism. See Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism*, p. 61.

²⁸⁶ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 268.

²⁸⁷ Gilmartin, "'This Is Very Material'", p. 82.

²⁸⁸ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 268.

²⁸⁹ In chapter 31 of *Capital*, entitled 'The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist', Marx notes that Cobbett was part of an early, if incorrect, critique of the logic animating the financial-capitalist system of the nineteenth century. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 921.

²⁹⁰ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 297.

²⁹¹ See Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, pp. 296-322.

²⁹² Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 309.

²⁹³ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 315.

²⁹⁴ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, p. 316.

²⁹⁵ Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 43.

²⁹⁶ Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle*, p. 43.

²⁹⁷ Cobbett sought to address the unique problems experienced by the Northern industrial component of his readership through publications like *Northern Tour* (1833), and *Manchester Lectures* (1832).

²⁹⁸ See Morton, *A People's History of England*, p. 321.

²⁹⁹ See G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People, 1746-1946* (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 255; and Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 808-9.

³⁰⁰ See William Cobbett, 'To The Working People Of The Whole Of The United Kingdom, On the Effects which a Parliamentary Reform will have with regard to them', *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 72 (7 May 1831), 306-19.

³⁰¹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 826.

³⁰² For the best assessment of this intellectual formation, see Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press: A Study In Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁰³ See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, pp. 187-202.

Conclusion

In most description and analysis, culture and society are expressed in an habitual past tense. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products. What is defensible as a procedure in conscious history, where on certain assumptions many actions can be definitively taken as having ended, is habitually projected, not only into the always moving substance of the past, but into contemporary life, in which relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes. Analysis is then centred on relations between these produced institutions, formations and experiences, so that now, as in that produced past, only the fixed explicit forms exist, and living presence is always, by definition, receding.¹

This account by Raymond Williams of the reifying effects of historical research on living cultural processes was included in David Harvey's recent mapping of the social production of globalization, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (1996). Harvey cites this passage approvingly as a declaration of Williams's 'strong preference for dialectical readings that prioritize the understanding of processes over things...'² Williams's articulation of cultural practices as evolutionary lived processes represents for Harvey a 'terrain of *theoretical* possibilities in which the reduction of relations between people into relations between concepts can be as continuously challenged as can our understanding of relationships, institutions, and forms be brought alive by focusing attention on the processes at work producing, sustaining, or dissolving them'.³ Based in part on this foundational theoretical assumption borrowed from Williams, Harvey defines globalization as 'a long standing *process* always implicit in capital accumulation rather than a political-economic condition that has recently come into being'.⁴ This definition of globalization as a long term process would imply that earlier oppositional critical discourses to capitalist modernization, however much a product of their specific historical conditions, can also inform contemporary strategies of anti-capitalist cultural resistance.

It is hoped that the juxtaposition of intellectual practices in the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres has provided a relevant historical case study for differing models of oppositional cultural politics during a crucial transitional period in the development of

industrial capitalism. Indeed, emphasis in this comparative cultural history has been placed on the way in which distinctive intellectual practices inevitably lead to differing strategies of cultural emancipation. The rival projects of cultural criticism traced in part two represent ideologically divergent responses to the dominant cultural narrative of industrial modernity. For the intellectuals associated with the *Edinburgh Review*, the new economic and social order emerging out of industrial capitalism presented them with a unique opportunity at cultural regulation, both on a popular and elite level. Utilitarian popular education on the one hand, and Romantic cultural critique on the other, were the related components of a wider strategy for the peaceful ideological integration of society during a politically volatile stage in the development of capitalism. Through the vehicle of the radical press, their counterparts in the plebeian public sphere worked to establish explicitly counter-hegemonic sites of cultural transmission where a developing popular audience could be guided into more collective structures of political resistance to that same process. Thus two forms of cultural politics that would become institutionalized in the later part of the nineteenth century, one of bourgeois integration and the other of popular opposition, could be said to have been incubated within differing models of civil society at the beginning of the century.

I have also sought to demonstrate how a practical materialization of Habermas's critical social theory—much like a historically specific engagement with Williams's experientially grounded cultural abstractions—can function to highlight basic issues of emancipatory intellectual practice. I very much agree with the German philosopher's leading North American interlocutor, Thomas McCarthy, when he writes: 'Habermas would deny, no doubt, that he ever intended to equate critical reflection with practical engagement or critical insight with practical emancipation. Yet he often seems to be doing just that.'⁵ In this view the theoretical model of the public sphere is not simply another value-neutral conceptual shell designed to encase a multiplicity of cultural practices, but an important contemporary articulation of a normative cultural space for the critical interrogation of administrative and economic institutions. Read back into the intellectual

practices of the Romantic period traced in this study, the public sphere becomes a crucial mediating lifeworld where a collective defence of precious non-market cultural traditions could be sustained.

This dissertation has attempted to contribute to a radical tradition of British cultural studies that seeks to engage as much in contemporary projects of cultural struggle as it does with more abstract questions of historical agency. I have privileged the kind of intellectual praxis developed in the plebeian public sphere because I feel it represents a more effective cultural model for the contemporary movements of resistance to advanced capitalism. To properly assess the implications of radical intellectual practice in the Romantic period for the anti-capitalist movements of today we first have to draw out the parallels between these two transformative periods of capital accumulation. Secondly, we have to locate the ways in which an oppositional cultural practice in the twenty-first century can actively mediate between the new structures of power and the discrete lifeworlds developing in their shadow. Finally, we have to address the broader role of culture within these new forms of political community.

The early nineteenth century was a period of dramatic capital accumulation in Britain, the world's first industrial capitalist power. As traced by Cobbett in the *Political Register*, the decimation of subsistence-based agrarian economies in the countryside was fuelled by the growth of finance-driven mass industrial production concentrated in a handful of urban centres. Much like the contemporary social geography of globalization, this economic process exacerbated in a British context what Harvey has called 'uneven geographical development' (discussed in chapter six). Rather than look to the cultivation of self-sustaining economies at home, the new social and economic elites that were created as a result of this process turned to the expanding world market as the basis of the nation's future wealth. It was at this crossroads in the economic and cultural development of Britain that the divergent traditions of social critique traced in this study emerged. The parallels of this historical period with what Harvey has called the 'extraordinarily powerful processes

of uneven spatio-temporal development' at work in globalization I hope have been made evident over the course of this study.⁶ What I would argue here is that the communities made most vulnerable in this process—which constitute the working majority of the population today in the advanced capitalist countries who live in perpetual anxiety of 'downsizing', unemployment, environmental degradation and the collapse of public services—represent the most fertile cultural constituencies for the kind of radical intellectual praxis displayed in the plebeian public sphere of the early nineteenth century.

Politically effective oppositional cultural practices in an era of globalization can benefit from the rich array of symbolic gestures developed during this earlier transformative period in the history of capitalism. Indeed, the new forms of resistance that culminated in the protest actions at the Third Ministerial Meeting in Seattle of December 1999, and the World Bank/IMF meeting in Prague in September of 2000, exhibited many of the characteristics of 'open constitutionalism' first pioneered by the counter publicists of the Radical movement in the early nineteenth century. In putting the hidden agenda of the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF in the full glare of the global media, the anti-capitalist protesters accomplished a remarkable feat of directed publicity that has significant parallels with the Radical demonstrations of 1819 and 1831-2. The use of new media forms and journalistic genres in the Romantic period for explicitly political ends also finds an echo in the innovative mobilization of the Internet by the various anti-capitalist campaigns of today. Much like the plebeian intellectuals' deployment of the pamphlet and radical weekly for the facilitation of immediate acts of collective political praxis, the anticorporate activists gathered in the many Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and independent political groups on the streets of Seattle and Prague utilized the Internet for the publication of movement manifestoes, web diaries and basic tactical information.⁷ In the absence of an established democratic institutional space for the discussion about, and transformation of, the new forces of capitalist development, the protesters at Seattle and Prague were

improvising a new transnational public sphere based on the unique convergence of lifeworlds that each particular movement represented.

As conceived in the plebeian public sphere, 'culture' was a materialist concept closely bound up with the collective political liberation of its audience. It was an intellectual expression of what Williams called 'practical consciousness', which he defines as that 'what is actually being lived... a kind of feeling and thinking which is social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become a fully articulate and defined exchange'.⁸ This idea of 'practical consciousness' is also an excellent conceptual approximation of the counter-hegemonic strategies of the anti-globalization activists. The concept may help academic cultural theorists to gain a better appreciation of the collective subjectivities of popular cultural struggle today, as well as to see these struggles as tentative expressions of an emancipatory consciousness. Indeed, the decentralized forms of resistance that typify postmodern cultural struggle may represent the emergence of a new kind of lifeworld in late capitalism; a cultural space where 'people are free to construct their own social realities in unprecedented ways', as the Marxist political thinker Ellen Meiksins Wood has put it.⁹ Much like their historical counterpart in the Radical movement of the early nineteenth century, the counter-hegemonic cultural formations that have emerged alongside the developing institutions of global capitalism have given an impetus to new kinds of radical intervention in the wider public sphere. The confluence of socialist, green, anarchist and feminist political counter-narratives to globalization have transformed the politics of protest into a cultural process that allows for both collective and individual narratives to be expressed, without obscuring the benefits of either. These new expressions of 'militant particularism', as Harvey has called it, have nevertheless shown themselves to be acutely aware of their wider material contexts, both 'firmly grounded in and transformative of the concrete historical and geographical conditions through which human action unfolds'.¹⁰

To reverse the observation by Williams at the opening of this conclusion, the contemporary practice of comparative cultural history cannot help but become only a fragmentary expression of the competing ideological and social forces that make up both the period under examination for the historian, and the present time in which he labours. This dissertation has attempted to uncover the ways in which intellectual practices in the Romantic period constructed conflicting cultural narratives at a historical juncture of immense social, economic and political ferment. However, the need for a critique of this essentially class-based approach to cultural practices in the early nineteenth century is beyond doubt. Comparative studies which begin with gender or nation as their organizing problematic for the period will necessarily develop different arguments about, and highlight distinctive aspects of, the cultural practices in the British public sphere traced in this study. This awareness of the particular limitations of any one theoretical approach is merely another reminder of the fallibility of all projects of research in the human sciences today. If I have managed to grasp only a small part of the ideological complexity of those culturally revolutionary first three decades of the nineteenth century, when intellectual actors and critical voices articulated competing moral and social perspectives, then perhaps this study will have served its function as merely a considered fragment for a more collaborative cultural history of the period yet to be written.

NOTES

¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 128-9. Also quoted in David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 24-5.

² Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 25.

³ Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 25.

⁴ Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 421.

⁵ Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 98.

⁶ Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 431.

⁷ See Naomi Klein, 'The Vision Thing', *The Nation*, 10 July 2000, pp. 18-21.

⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 130-1.

⁹ See Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 262.

¹⁰ Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, p. 433.

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