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The Appearance of Character

Physiognomy and Facial Expression in Eighteenth-Century France

MELISSA PERCIVAL

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FOR MY PARENTS

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University of Exeter, 1999 M.P.

Note for readers: Many quotations in this book are from early editions, and therefore contain a number of irregularites of spelling and punctuation.

INTRODUCTION

Physiognomy is commonly perceived as a marginal subject, involving discredited and 'unscientific' notions of the relationship between character and physical appearance. Physiognomical inquiry is often underpinned by a determinism which is thought to be at odds with the arbitrary, unpredictable nature of human existence. Moreover, the principles of typology, measurement and cataloguing which are frequently resorted to by physiognomists are viewed at best as spurious and at worst as legitimating the pernicious excesses of eugenics and social programming.[1] Even those scholars who take physiognomy seriously tend to couch their arguments in the most uncompromising terms, reflective of what they see as its unflexing dogmatism.[2]

Physiognomy has always been controversial, largely because of its perennial claim to scientific status. If people can agree in a vague, indeterminate sense that we all judge by appearances, they are less convinced by attempts, however enthralling, to classify or systematise human features according to a particular scientific method. One of the greatest problems of physiognomy has been the misapplication of the principles of the 'hard' sciences to a more unquantifiable human science. A salient eighteenth-century example of this is Petrus Camper's theory of the facial angle where algebraic measurements implicitly endorse a rigid socio-racial hierarchy.[3] Yet the boundaries between science and pseudo-science are notoriously difficult to draw, a fact which is most obvious in physiognomy's persistent and pervasive relationship with medicine over the centuries. It has been shown that in Roman times, physiognomics and astrology had claims to scientific status which were equal to and possibly even stronger than that of medicine, and it will be seen in this book that the authors of physiognomical treatises from several eras were themselves physicians.[4]

Another reason for physiognomy's marginal status is that it is usually deemed to be a phenomenon of the past, something which has been superseded by scientific 'progress'. But in fact many modern examples may be found of the theorisation of the relationship between character and physical appearance, though even here the 'legitimacy' of such works varies vastly. We can distinguish between research which calls for serious intellectual appraisal, works of popular psychology and those which are downright oddities. Into the first category comes the fascinating work of Paul Ekman on the extent to which facial expression is either culturally conditioned or biologically determined, research which encompasses such issues as how global television homogenises hitherto culturally distinct facial responses.[5] Also into this

category comes the study of individuals who for various reasons suffer from deficits in facial expression.[6] Equally, neurology has become an important new area of research: the ability to distinguish facial expression has been linked to a particular region of the brain, and this may have important consequences for the sufferers of certain forms of autism who have trouble reading the signals of emotion in others.[7] In contrast to this 'serious' research, the aim of books such as Rodney Davies's *How to read faces* which analyses the traits of famous people and Lailan Young's *Secrets of the Face* which draws on Chinese theories of physiognomy is primarily to entertain.[8] Lastly, the volume *Physionomie et caractère* in the outwardly respectable 'Que sais-je?' series with its straight-faced presentation of the theories of morphopsychology, and the 'How to' manuals of Louis Corman do little more than dress up ancient physiognomical theories in modern jargon and consequently have a more questionable status.[9]

Physiognomical treatises, since their origins in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica*, have claimed to offer access to the 'truth', an infallible method for unmasking the human individual. Indeed, one might define the physiognomical treatise as a work which adopts a number of rhetorical strategies in order to persuade the reader of the validity of the 'science'. Such truth claims deserve to be addressed, but they may also deflect our attention from more interesting and far-reaching questions about the nature of relationships between appearance and essence. Physiognomy, I believe, is not confined to the physiognomical treatise, for relationships between physical traits and inner natures may be found in a great number of different works, disciplines and thought processes. All the examples mentioned above, regardless of their scientific validity, are manifestations of what I call 'physiognomical thought' and are therefore worthy of equal consideration. In short, the question of belief or disbelief is unimportant to the present study and a much broader definition of physiognomy is adopted than that which is commonly assumed. Furthermore, rather than seeing physiognomy as dogmatic, this book emphasises its more tentative and speculative aspects.

Reading people's faces is a vital and basic part of human interaction: a new-born baby gradually learns to recognise its parents and in time is able to smile back at them, a development which involves the complex interplay of muscles, biological programming and environment. Indeed, our ability or need to perceive human traits is so profound that we even seek out faces in nature and in abstract forms, and we design cars which resemble living beings.[10] In addition to recognising and responding to others, human communication necessitates an understanding of people's motivations and an ability to infer these from speech, action and, crucially, from appearance. Thus, physiognomical judgements — discerning inner 'truths' from external signs —

are an essential part of everyday life. And beyond this communicative level, the desire to understand people's motivations is part of a basic human curiosity about essences, about what people really are. The extent to which physiognomy is inherent in people's consciousness is clear from everyday terms like 'faceless', 'chinless', 'highbrow' and 'nosy' to François Mitterrand's famous quip about Margaret Thatcher having the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe.

Physiognomical thought is found within a large variety of disciplines: physiology, the social sciences, the visual and performing arts or indeed in any subject which examines relationships between the inside and outside of the human body. It may be perceived in older disciplines such as moral philosophy which posit links between physical and mental states, but also in modern fields such as cognitive and social psychology, and semiotics. In other words, similar issues regarding character and physical appearance are reformulated in different terms in various historical contexts. Paradoxically, therefore, the science of forms is itself amorphous. Assuming different shapes in a variety of discourses, it constantly adapts itself to current patterns of thought and modes of discourse.

But physiognomy need not even be confined to the human face or exterior, for it can also encompass a loose notion of correspondence between inner and outer, between body and soul, between physical and moral. In such a guise, physiognomy forms a part of any study which establishes links between external appearance and an inner intangible 'truth'. Platonism posits that beyond the imperfect forms of the physical world there lies a realm of ideal forms. This may be compared with the Christian dualism of body and soul, where the frail and unruly body is considered to be inferior to the perfect, immortal soul. The combined influence of Platonism and Christianity on Western thought means that metaphors of surface and depth abound. Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that, in terms of the Western tradition, physiognomy is equivalent to knowledge itself, for learning and establishing truths involves a process of unmasking and revelation.[11] In a move which might be deemed 'anti-physiognomical', the existence and validity of such metaphysical 'truths' has been thoroughly questioned by Derrida and other post-structuralist thinkers.

From a limited conception of physiognomy as a marginal pseudo-science, we have therefore moved to another extreme position where any loose notion of inner-outer correspondence may be deemed physiognomical. Yet if physiognomy is ubiquitous, it is also elusive. How is it possible to pin down this vast and constantly shifting phenomenon? It seems both legitimate and sensible to tackle the subject of physiognomy with reference to a specific historical context. Which aspects of physiognomy are palatable to a particular

period? Which are selected, emphasised and adapted to contemporary preoccupations and forms of discourse, and why is this the case? A survey of twentieth-century issues might see a modern form of physiognomy in DNA sequencing and genetic data and its concomitant ethical dilemmas, for here, we are told, lie the true and inescapable traits of the self. It might also see plastic surgery as the ultimate physiognomical statement, the opportunity to shape the features according to one's idea of self; or conversely it might interpret it as the ultimate denial of physiognomy, the chance to lie about oneself or to deny the validity of the individual trait by conforming to uniform conceptions of beauty.[12] But another age would have vastly different physiognomical concerns.

The first task of this book is to establish the characteristics of physiognomical thought and discourse in eighteenth century France, with particular reference to the mid-eighteenth century. This is the subject of Chapter 1, and the conclusions drawn there underpin the discussions of subsequent chapters. For several reasons, the early and middle years of the century have been regarded as rather a barren period in the history of physiognomy. Firstly, there was a decline in the number of physiognomical treatises produced at this time. This was combined with what appears to be scepticism regarding the validity of physiognomy in an enlightened age. Finally, the period has been somewhat neglected by historians because they have tended to focus instead on Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), whose work on physiognomy in Zurich in the 1770s triggered a huge popular revival all over Europe. Lavater is commonly perceived as an innovator and his work is frequently taken as a starting point for an examination of physiognomy.[13] Certainly, in the late eighteenth century and for much of the nineteenth, he was a household name, and his influence upon major novelists such as Balzac, Stendhal and Dickens has been recognised.[14] Besides this, the wealth of recent studies devoted to nineteenth-century manifestations of physiognomy such as caricature, class and ethnic stereotypes tends to reinforce the impression that physiognomy began with Lavater.[15]

Lavater's was undoubtedly the most comprehensive and complex utterance on physiognomy of the eighteenth century. But it should be remembered that he borrowed heavily from sources both ancient and modern, and that he himself was well aware that he was working within a tradition. In order to understand the intellectual conditions in which Lavater was working, and also the various shifts in consciousness which he brought about, we need to go back to the period immediately preceding his investigations. Only then can we account for the accelerated production of works on physiognomy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. This study therefore adopts an unusual critical perspective on Lavater, seeing his work in many respects as the

culmination rather than the starting point of eighteenth-century physiognomical thought. In other areas it actually finds him to be regressive, returning to ideas which had been discarded at least thirty years previously. It is therefore appropriate that he should be treated in the final chapter of this book, Chapter 8.

Besides providing a context for the work of Lavater, I question the assumption that mid-eighteenth century France was a time of inactivity and resistance to physiognomy. On the contrary, I show that the period was particularly fascinated by the workings of the face and its relation to character, even if this fascination was shot through with a deep ambivalence. Physiognomy was still strongly associated in people's minds with the arts of divination and other superstitious practices which were seemingly incompatible with the Enlightenment project of rational inquiry. A new definition of physiognomy was therefore called for, a radical shift in assumptions, methods and modes of description. Physiognomical theories were profoundly shaped by prevailing philosophical trends and scientific methods: drawing on empiricism, physiognomy evolved a whole new way of looking at the world, seeing nature in terms of infinite variety and each human face as a unique and separate entity.

A large part of the book is devoted to my second area of concern: aesthetics. Physiognomy is discussed in relation to problems of representation, notably the expression of the passions in the visual and performing arts. A key consideration is the role of the seventeenth-century artist Charles Le Brun. Chapter 2 examines his *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1668) and the work's fundamental role in shaping eighteenth-century theories of expression and drawing practice. Chapter 3 focuses on a particular moment in the history of expression, the mid-eighteenth century, and defines a new aesthetic of facial expression which operates in tension with Le Brun's aesthetic. The theoretical emphasis of Chapter 3 is replaced in the next three chapters by an emphasis on artistic practice. Chapter 4 is an exploratory chapter with a somewhat different methodology to the others. It develops the idea of a materialist physiognomics and applies this to the pastel portraits of Maurice Quentin de La Tour. Chapter 5 focuses on the Comte de Caylus's *concours* for the drawing of an expressive head at the Paris Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, first held in 1760, which exemplifies many of the contradictions of expressive theory and practice of the time. Chapter 6 reveals how the artist Jean-Baptiste Greuze fundamentally redefines the concept of expression, and how he develops the poorly understood category of painting, the *tête d'expression*. Chapter 7 brings out parallels between expression in painting and theories of acting. The practical elements of stagecraft — make-up, lighting and masks — are also examined in relation to facial expression.

The title of this book, *The Appearance of Character*, points to the relationship between character and physical appearance in eighteenth-century France. But it also points to the third subject of investigation, namely the notion of character. The philosophical concept of the 'self' in this period has been explored rather thoroughly: several scholars have identified the mid-eighteenth century as the moment of the emergence of the development of an individual consciousness, and they have acknowledged the central role of Rousseau in its development.[16] One could easily dispute this theory (how does one account for Montaigne, for instance?), but the purpose of this book is not to grapple or take issue with this complex concept, but rather to explore the notion of identity through different means: through the analysis of the term 'caractère' as a psychological phenomenon and also as an aesthetic term. In his study of character in seventeenth century *moraliste* writing, Louis Van Delft has indicated the even greater complexity of character in the eighteenth century, and also the potential richness of any investigation.[17] This book is therefore a response to Van Delft's challenge.

The study of physiognomy is intimately connected with the study of character. The etymological sense of 'character', meaning 'mark' or 'imprint', reveals the close association of physical and psychological traits and this was apparent to many eighteenth-century writers. Duclos's statement, 'Les hommes sans caractère sont des visages sans physionomie', implicitly suggests that character and appearance are inseparable.[18] But it must be borne in mind that, just as theories of physiognomy are constantly changing, so are the notions of character upon which these theories are predicated. In this book I identify several different notions of character which correspond to different physiognomical theories or assumptions. In particular, I explore various manifestations of character as dynamic, which correspond to the increased interest in the moving passions as indicative of identity.

Previous scholarship devoted to eighteenth-century physiognomy has tended to focus on certain individuals. Marivaux, Fielding, Hogarth and Lichtenberg have received the most attention after Lavater.[19] There have also been some perceptive but brief analyses of the techniques and conventions of character description in novels.[20] Regrettably in the present book, fiction has had to yield space to painting and theatre; however, much work remains to be done on the subject of physiognomy in eighteenth-century literature. Another area which has been intensively explored is the analysis of dress and social behaviour. Ancien Régime society, with its wigs, extravagant *coiffures*, make-up, masks, high heels and panniers, was one of the most heavily masked societies in history. Yet Richard Sennett has argued convincingly for a form of physiognomy in eighteenth-century public life based on a set of mutually agreed and easily repeatable signs.[21] Philippe Perrot has explored the

codification of seduction achieved through the application of beauty spots to different parts of the face: near the eye meant *assassine*, on the lips *friponne*, on the forehead *majestueuse*, and so on.[22] Daniel Roche has further complicated the notion of an elaborate semiotics of dress with his exploration of the dynamics of production and exchange in the clothes business.[23] Finally, Roy Porter has pointed out other links between physiognomy and fashion.[24]

Fascinating though these subjects are, this book covers somewhat different ground. This is a project in the history of ideas rather than a socio-historical study of human behaviour. I ask how eighteenth-century thinkers conceived of physiognomy rather than whether and how they put physiognomical notions into practice. One of the most important tasks has been to establish a corpus of physiognomical texts from the period. As I have already suggested, physiognomical discourse is not confined to works which loudly advertise themselves as physiognomical treatises, and it will be seen that the most interesting utterances on physiognomy are scattered among a wide variety of writings. The difficulty of locating the key texts is sometimes compounded by a reluctance among eighteenth-century writers to use the term 'physiognomy'. But this fact in itself is significant and requires explanation.

Physiognomy is a truly interdisciplinary subject and the material examined here is drawn from many domains: philosophy, physiology, anthropology, painting, the performing arts and, to a lesser extent, fiction. Mainly theoretical material is used, from treatises on physiognomy and on expression in painting to actors' and artists' manuals. The aim is not primarily to reveal the direct influence of writers on one other, although in cases such as Buffon's this influence is remarkable. The intention is rather to show a general climate, to display the patterns of thought and discourse which constitute the 'physiognomical consciousness' of a particular age. Though the focus is primarily on France, I use it as an example rather than an exclusive case, for the patterns of thought discovered there frequently relate to developments in other European countries. Major and minor works have been juxtaposed in order to reveal the dominance and recurrence of certain ideas. Unfortunately, this has been at the expense of a full consideration of the work of certain individuals. In particular, Diderot's views on physiognomy and facial expression are worthy of a full-length study in their own right, and a suggestion of the richness of his ideas is given in the discussion of his *Essais sur la peinture* (1766) in Chapter 3. His presence in this book is constant if not central.

* * *

Some clarification is needed of the different words which were used in the eighteenth century to describe physiognomy and faces. The following guide is

a general outline rather than an exhaustive survey. It has been compiled using a range of eighteenth-century texts and with reference to Jean Renson's more systematic analysis of synonyms for 'face' in Romance languages.[25]

'Physiognomy' is derived from three Greek words: 'physis' (nature), 'nomos' (law)', and 'gnomon' (judge, interpreter). The etymological meaning of physiognomy is therefore either 'law of nature' or 'interpreter of nature'. Two different words, 'physionomie' and 'physiognomonie', stemming from 'nomos' and 'gnomon', were used concurrently in France for several centuries, and this is still the case today. 'Physionomie', in use since the thirteenth century, meant 'the art or science of determining a person's character from his exterior and particularly his face', but in the fourteenth century it also acquired the meanings 'expression', 'assemblage of features' or simply 'face'. 'Physiognomonie', which was first used in the sixteenth century, had just one meaning: 'the art or science of determining a person's character from his exterior'. In practice, this term was rarely used, possibly because it is cumbersome to pronounce and to write, and 'physionomie' was used in preference.

In the eighteenth century, 'physionomie' (occasionally 'phisionomie') was used to mean both the art of 'judging character' and also 'face' or 'expression'. But often these meanings came together to suggest 'a face which is expressive of character'. This may be seen in Vauvenargues's definition: 'La physionomie est l'expression du caractère et celle du tempérament. Une sotte physionomie est celle qui n'exprime que la compléxion, comme un tempérament robuste etc.'.[26] A face seen as having a psychological significance or being indicative of character was also suggested in the commonly used expressions 'avoir de la physionomie' (to have an interesting face and therefore to have character) and 'sans physionomie' (faceless, lacking in character).

Occasionally, 'physionomie' had the more general meaning 'aspect', for example with reference to a landscape or town, or even to a historical period. (This use of the word can still be found today in the section 'Physionomie du pays' of the *Guides Michelin.*) Louis-Sébastien Mercier describes his multi-volume analysis of Parisian life under the heading 'Physionomie de la grande ville', and his overall project is concerned with 'la physionomie de mon siècle'.[27] The *Dictionnaire des richesses de la langue française* conflates this meaning of 'physionomie' with its more usual meaning by misquoting Rousseau: 'l'histoire moderne n'a plus de phisionomie, parce que les hommes se ressemblent tous'.[28]

The term 'physiognomonie' was rare in the eighteenth century before the first French edition of Lavater, the *Essais sur la physiognomonie* (1781-1801), but after this it became much more common.[29] One of the earliest English

translators of this French edition suggests that the French have coined a new word, which was not strictly true but which shows that the word had probably fallen out of favour.[30]

Unlike 'physionomie', which implied psychological depth and permanence, the word 'mine' suggested a more superficial or transient facial expression. It had connotations of changing sentiments, but was also used pejoratively to imply an artful kind of social performance. The calculated nature of the 'mine' is evident in a scene from *Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit* by Crébillon *Fils*, where the older and jealous Madame de Lursay warns Meilcour about the immodest behaviour of the coquette Madame de Senanges: 'La politesse n'exige point qu'on fasse des mines à quelqu'un'. To this the *ingénu* Meilcour replies: 'En vérité! Madame [...] j'ignore ce que c'est qu'une mine, et vous le savez bien'.[31] The use of the plural 'faire des mines' implied extreme facial mobility, but also affectation. An analogous term implying coquettish facial play was 'minauderie', which was compounded by 'façons' and 'grâces', used in the plural. Similar to 'mine', 'minois' referred to a young delicate face. In contrast to the moving 'mine', the word 'contenance' was used to suggest composure or 'containment', even repression, of the emotions. The expression 'perdre contenance', or to lose one's facial composure (by implication, to 'lose face') was exploited by Marivaux in particular.[32] Finally, the word 'masque' could refer quite neutrally to the face though it could also imply deceit.

NOTES

1. Typical are the views expressed by David Le Breton in *Des Visages* (Paris: A. M. Métaillé, 1992), p. 85.
2. Georges Didi-Hubermann sees physiognomy as a ruthless quest to 'maîtriser le sens': 'La Grammaire, le chahut, le silence. Pour une anthropologie du visage', in *A Visage découvert*, exhibition catalogue, Fondation Cartier (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 15-54 (p. 24); Barbara Stafford qualifies physiognomy as crushingly logocentric, as 'annihilating lexical criticism': *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1991), p. 48.
3. Camper will be discussed in Chapter 1.
4. Tamsyn Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 2.
5. 'L'Expression des émotions', *La Recherche*, 117 (1980), 1408-15. See also *Emotion in the Human Face*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
6. See Jonathan Cole's absorbing study, *About Face* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997).
7. *Nature*, 393/6684 (4 June 1998) declares that 'The study of emotion is enjoying a renaissance' (p. 417), and includes two papers on the role of the brain part known as the amygdala (pp. 467-74).
8. *How to Read Faces* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1989); *Secrets of the Face: The Chinese Art of Reading Character from Faces* (London: Coronet, 1984). See also Young's more recent work: *The Naked Face: The Essential Guide to Reading Faces* (London: Century, 1993).
9. Francis Baud, *Physionomie et caractère*, 'Que sais-je?' series no. 277 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969); Louis Corman, *Caractérologie et morphopsychologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983); *ABC des expressions du visage* (Paris: Jacques Grandier, 1991).

10. See Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1959). Chapter 10, 'The Experiment of Caricature', argues that caricature is dependent on our ability to read human and expressive qualities into almost any shape. This assertion is corroborated in chapter 3 (pp. 88-89) with reference to Picasso's *Baboon and Young*, where a Citroën 2CV forms the head of the mother baboon.
11. Ludmilla Jordanova relates such general physiognomical notions to the importance of the visual in Enlightenment science and medicine: *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 92.
12. See Joanne Finkelstein's graphic descriptions of bodily reshaping in *The Fashioned Self* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).
13. Graeme Tytler points out that Lavater has often mistakenly been considered the inventor of physiognomy, and yet he implicitly suggests in subsequent chapters that Lavater is single-handedly responsible for the development of physiognomical description in the nineteenth-century European novel: *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 35.
14. Michael Hollington, 'The Live Hieroglyphic: *Physiologie* and Physiognomy in "Martin Chuzzlewit"', *Dickens Quarterly*, 10 (1993), 57-68. See also his previous articles in the same journal; Christopher Rivers, *Face Values: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
15. See especially, Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982); Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Shearer West, 'The Construction of Racial Type: Caricature, Ethnography and Jewish Physiognomy in *Fin de siècle* Melodrama', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre*, 21 (1993), 5-40.
16. See Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Jean A. Perkins observes that eighteenth-century thinkers confused the 'self' as an object of scrutiny with the 'self' as the subject of experience: *The Concept of the Self in the French Enlightenment* (Geneva: Droz, 1969), p. 3. John O. Lyons shrewdly questions the existence of the 'self' other than a purely schematic concept: *The Invention of the Self: The Hinge of Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century* (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 18-26.
17. *Littérature et anthropologie: Nature humaine et caractère à l'âge classique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), 259-60.
18. *Considérations sur les moeurs de ce siècle* (Paris: Rencontre, 1970; first published 1751), p. 334.
19. For a full bibliography of Lavater, see Chapter 7; on Marivaux, see Rivers, *Face Values*; on Fielding and Hogarth, see Michael Shortland, 'The Body in Question: Some Perceptions, Problems and Perspectives of the Body in Relation to Character c.1750-1830' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1984).
20. Barbara M. Benedict, 'Reading Faces: Physiognomy and Epistemology in Late Eighteenth-Century Sentimental Novels', *Studies in Philology*, 92 (1995), 311-28; F. Price, 'Imagining Faces: The Later Eighteenth-Century Sentimental Heroine and the Legible Universal Language of Physiognomy', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 6 (1983), 1-16; Geoffrey Day, *From Fiction to the Novel* (London/New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), Chapter 3, 'Amelia's Nose: Perceptions of Reality', pp. 63-110.
21. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Faber, 1986). Such a separation between public and private ignores the richness and ambiguity of the liminal interactions of the *cabinet de toilette*, discussed by Philippe Perrot, *Le Travail des apparences: le corps féminin, XVIIIème-XXème siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 40-46.
22. Perrot, p. 51.
23. *La Culture des apparences* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).
24. 'Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England', *Etudes anglaises*, 38 (1985), 385-96.
25. *Les Dénominations du visage en français et dans les autres langues romanes*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1962).
26. *Introduction à la connaissance de l'esprit humain*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henry Bonnier, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1968), I, 235.
27. *Tableaux de Paris*, 2nd edn, 12 vols (Amsterdam, 1782-88), I, 15; I, xiii.
28. Phisionomie', in *Dictionnaire des richesses de la langue française* (Paris, 1770; repr. Genève: Slatkine, 1968), p. 338. In the original, the connection between the two uses of the word is

implicit but a causal relationship is not established: in the child's education, Rousseau resolves to leave aside modern history 'parce qu'elle n'a plus de physionomie et que les hommes se ressemblent tous'. *Emile, ou l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, IV, 528.

29. Renson (I, 388) has traced an example from 1721, but does not indicate his source. The *Dictionnaire universel*, 7 vols (Paris, 1752), has an entry 'Physiognomonie'.
30. *Essays on Physiognomy Designed to Promote the Knowledge and Love of Mankind by John Caspar Lavater. Translated from the French by Henry Hunter*, 3 vols (1789), I, 20.
31. *Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1985), p. 169.
32. See Climal's reaction to Marianne, *La Vie de Marianne*, (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978), p. 199.

CHAPTER 1

ENLIGHTENED PHYSIOGNOMICS: THE TERMS OF THE DEBATE

An examination of physiognomy in the eighteenth century might well begin as late as 1775. It was then that Johann Caspar Lavater published the first volume of his *Physiognomische Fragmente*, sparking what Georg Christoph Lichtenberg described as the 'Raserei für Physiognomik', or popular 'physiognomical frenzy' which lasted until well into the following century.[1] In contrast, the early and middle years of the century have been seen as a period of inactivity, even hostility.[2] Frequently cited is Buffon's scepticism in his *Histoire naturelle* where he labels physiognomy 'cette espèce de préjugé', a view which is corroborated by the *Encyclopédie*'s dismissive 'M. de Buffon a dit tout ce qu'on peut penser de mieux sur cette science ridicule'.[3]

One could try to account for physiognomy's apparent decadence in this period by claiming that a dubious pseudo-science was definitively stamped out by the spread of Enlightenment rationalism. In such a context, Lavater's success could be seen as evidence of the subsequent flourishing of an anti-rational, pre-Romantic sensibility. But the climate of eighteenth-century thought, and indeed the work of Lavater, is much more complex than this and, as scholars have repeatedly proved, occult beliefs and practices coexisted with empirical rationalism, often at the heart of educated society.[4] Thus, the Chevalier de Jaucourt's robust dismissal in his article 'Physionomie' may be taken as the overt message of the *Encyclopédie*; but a much more ambiguous response to the subject is given in Diderot's article 'Théosophes', where the *philosophe* is captivated by theosophers' powers of intuition and presentiment and their ability to draw analogies between the most disparate of natural phenomena, a gift which Diderot explicitly associates with the skills of the physiognomist. It is obvious, therefore, that we need to look beyond the surface of Enlightenment thought.

Physiognomy was undoubtedly problematic in the eighteenth century, chiefly because it was still connected in people's minds with astrology and other divinatory arts which had largely been discredited. Moreover, it was still conceived of in terms of a world picture which had no relevance to the age, a Renaissance view of correspondence and analogy between humans, the natural world and the heavens. This accounts for much of the scepticism surrounding the subject. Yet the relationship between the human face and the workings of the soul, between physical and mental processes, together with questions of identity, self-determination and other concerns which may be labelled

'physiognomical' were of crucial importance to Enlightenment thinkers, just as much as to thinkers of previous ages. But the terms of the discussion needed to change: it was necessary for physiognomy to undergo a radical epistemological transformation in order to be relevant to the issues of the day. In other words, a form of 'Enlightened physiognomics' was called for.

This chapter does not seek to outline physiognomy's persistence as 'superstition' in the eighteenth century. Nor is it concerned with popular culture where, in all likelihood, the beliefs of past centuries were still circulating.[5] Rather, it focuses on the role of physiognomy within mainstream disciplines and modes of discourse, aiming to establish networks of ideas and modes of expression which are typical of the period. Two texts which set out the conditions of physiognomy for their age are examined: the *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* (1746), which are usually attributed to the Abbé Jacques Pernetti, and a passage from Buffon's much better known *Histoire naturelle* (1749-67). The *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* may be classed as a physiognomical treatise in that their chief purpose is to persuade the reader of the value of physiognomical expertise. Buffon's text stands outside the tradition of the treatise in that it forms part of a larger work which is not devoted to physiognomy. Rather than rejecting physiognomy, Buffon crucially reshapes the terms of the debate, and in so doing, offers one of the most characteristic utterances of his time.

The history of physiognomy is too vast to be dealt with in detail here; however, two previous models are used to indicate shifts in thinking: a model of Renaissance cosmology and the comparative physiognomy of the mid-seventeenth century.[6]

THE SHEDDING OF RENAISSANCE COSMOLOGY

The *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* (1746) were more than a modest success in their day. The 1747 review in *La Bibliothèque raisonnée* was so favourable that it became the preface to the second edition of the *Lettres* in 1748.[7] This second edition was translated into English in 1751 as the *Philosophical Letters on Physiognomies*, and a third edition, published in 1760, was described by Fréron in *L'Année littéraire* as 'cette ingénieuse production'.[8]

Jacques Pernetti was responsible for the work's publication, but recently Geraldine Sheridan has argued persuasively that its author was in fact Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant (1690-1743).[9] Sheridan's central arguments are the work's flamboyant style and its clear sensualist and materialist undercurrent, both of which are aspects of Bougeant's other writing, unlike that of Pernetti. However, a key passage by Thiébault, upon which Sheridan relies, raises more questions than it provides answers.[10] More importantly, her

exposition of Bougeant's interest in animals, seen particularly in his *Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bestes* (1739), does not square with the absence of animal comparisons in the *Lettres*.[11] This characteristic of the work is significant and will be discussed below. The fact that Pernetti was conducting research into physiognomy around the likely time of composition of the *Lettres* in the 1730s and that the two lived and worked together at Louis le Grand means that a collaboration cannot be ruled out, as Sheridan concedes. It seems, therefore, that the question of authorship cannot effectively be resolved, but ultimately this question is unimportant to the present study which deals with patterns of thought rather than direct influences. Because of the plausibility of many of Sheridan's arguments, and also for convenience's sake, I will henceforth refer to the author of the *Lettres* as 'Bougeant'.

Regardless of the work's authorship, the family links with another writer on physiognomy should be pointed out here. Pernetti was the uncle and tutor of Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety, a defrocked Benedictine and companion of Bougainville on his voyage to the Falkland Islands. If Thiébault is to be believed, when Pernety arrived at Potsdam as an exile, Frederick the Great, imagining him to be the author of the *Lettres* which he had much appreciated in his youth, mistakenly welcomed the nephew rather than the uncle and gave him the post of librarian.[12] Pernety went on to debate physiognomy in the Berlin Academy with his rival Henri de Catt, and his speeches formed the basis of his later work, *La Connoissance de l'homme moral par celle de l'homme physique* (1776).

Most explicit in the *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* is the shedding of links with the associated 'sciences' of metoposcopy and chiromancy. These are derided by Bougeant as 'folie & extravagance' (p. 40). Metoposcopy was the study of the lines on the forehead, believed to correspond to the different planets, and chiromancy was the science of palm-reading which also had a planetary significance. In Renaissance cosmology, the three 'sciences' were seen as mutually compatible, based as they were on man's self-definition through correspondences with the natural and the celestial world. Just as man was seen as a microcosm of the universe, so the face or hand was a microcosm of the human body. For example, Girolamo Cardano's influential *Metoposcopia* (1558) contains elaborate labelled diagrams of facial lines and their corresponding planets. The frontal lines correspond respectively in descending order to Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury and lastly the moon which is found in two arches above the eyebrows. Moreover, the title alone of Richard Saunders's *Physiognomie and Chiromancie* (1653) shows how the subjects were treated together.

Intrinsic to the Renaissance understanding of the world was the doctrine of *signatures* which posited relations of similitude between elements of the

universe.[13] Signs were based on the notion of resemblance between parts, for example the sun and sunflowers, and walnuts which were used to treat headaches because of their physical resemblance to the brain. Whole networks of similarities existed, but at the centre was the body and particularly the face of man where all signs were concentrated and reflected. These dense networks of correspondences were not apparent to the casual observer but lay hidden, waiting to be uncovered. Only with great skill and application could the relationship between these disparate elements be perceived, and only then could man come close to the mind of God.

The study of the signs of the human body was thus intimately linked with the study of the universe. Medieval medicine had a strong astrological component, for the planets were believed to have a controlling effect on the passions and the humours, and this belief persisted into the Early Modern period. Physiognomy and medicine also had close links through the study of semiotics which sought to trace the course of disease through bodily signs, and this is evident from the proportion of authors of physiognomical treatises with a medical background. Thus the roles of the medical practitioner, physiognomist, soothsayer and divine tended to blur into one another and the role of such a figure in the community was that of unchallenged expert, surrounded by an aura of mystery and revelation.

Medical semiotics traditionally divided signs into three categories: anamnestic, which revealed the events of the past from the signs of the present, diagnostic, which determined the present state, and prognostic, which predicted the future course of illness. In the latter category, the links with divination were apparent, for it was a small step from the prognostics of human illness to speculation on human destiny when it came to reading the future from the marks of the present.[14] Divination in astrology, medicine and physiognomy was the target of frequent attacks and interdicts by the Church for it seemed fundamentally to undermine the Christian principle of free will.

In the late sixteenth century, a partial separation became apparent between astrological interpretations of the body and an observational method more akin to empirical scientific method, and this has been attributed to the effects of the Counter-Reformation.[15] Gianbattista della Porta's *De Humana Physiognomonia* (1586), which rationalises and homogenises a great number of previous physiognomical treatises, is usually singled out as the first treatise to posit this observational approach.[16] It views the human body as an autonomous organic whole, governed by the temperaments rather than by astrological influences, and includes detailed descriptions of the various bodily parts, especially the eyes, to which one book out of four is devoted.[17] This is not to ignore the significance of della Porta's extensive comparisons between human and animal morphologies, for clearly in these the human body is not

judged as an entity, but according to an external standard; however, in his rejection of the planets and in his use of visual evidence, della Porta's position is novel and ahead of its time. From this point on, even if it was not apparent to contemporaries, a split can be perceived in physiognomical thought between objective rational science and more divinatory practices which were linked to the astral world. Metoposcopy and chiromancy were by their nature linked to the planets, yet physiognomy could be conceived of in different terms, in relation to the independently functioning human body. And so, by Bougeant's day, metoposcopy and chiromancy were much more closely linked with superstition than physiognomy was.

Despite the apparent modernity of della Porta's approach, metoposcopy and chiromancy were prevalent as late as the mid-seventeenth century and, in popular culture, probably much later. A revival of interest in France in the mid-seventeenth century led to the republication of a large number of major works on physiognomy, metoposcopy and chiromancy, and this indicates that the prevailing intellectual climate did not regard them as mutually incompatible.[18] Cureau de la Chambre, physician to Louis XIV and member of the Académie des Sciences, produced a key work on physiognomy, *L'Art de connoistre les hommes* (1660), which included additional treatises on metoposcopy and chiromancy. Though Cureau expresses some reservations regarding the role of the planets in these two treatises, he does not reject their premises outright, and sees them as complementary to physiognomy; however, his work on physiognomy does not discuss astrological influences, but instead focuses on man as both a natural and a social being.[19] Cureau argues that there is no longer a need for a glass of Momus to offer a glimpse of the soul, for man's motivations are written upon his face. Behind Cureau's text lies the anxiety of the social interactions at the court of Versailles, where it was vital to uncover the true motivations of others in order to maintain one's own position or to plan strategies for self-advancement.[20]

Cureau's text was one of the last to deal with metoposcopy and chiromancy and, even then, his hesitation over astrological influences shows that their presence was increasingly vestigial. By Bougeant's time, metoposcopy and chiromancy were fully associated with outdated and superstitious practices and beliefs, and physiognomy, because of its historical links, was condemned alongside them; however, Bougeant proposes a new relevance for physiognomy by drawing on the notion of man as an independent being, the seeds of which were found in della Porta. Moreover, he claims that the certainty of physiognomy is guaranteed by this independence, 'Puisqu'elle [physiognomy] représente les hommes en eux-mêmes & indépendemment de ce qui les environne' (p. 27). His schema is based purely on a belief in the transparency of the human face: 'C'est donc sur le visage préférablement,

qu'on doit juger de l'homme, parce que c'est sur le visage qu'il étalle le plus clairement son Tempérament, son Caractère & parconséquent, ses Passions' (p. 185). Implied in the work is that man is uniquely responsible for his own moral identity, independent of his surroundings, and is free to realise his own moral potential, whilst divination, the 'fortune-telling' aspect of traditional physiognomy, is transformed into the revelation of this moral potential: 'Un vrai physionomiste ne prédit jamais ce qu'on fera, mais ce qu'on devroit être, il ne sçauroit deviner les Circonstances où l'on se trouvera; mais il devinera la maniere dont on s'y conduira, si l'on s'y trouve' (p. 4). Bougeant thereby evades the determinism inherent in much physiognomical discourse, and endows the individual with a moral and social responsibility.

In their rejection of these outdated sciences and their assertion of man's independence, the *Lettres* reveal the direction which physiognomy will take for the rest of the century. This is evident from the words of Thomas Cooper, who, writing his history of physiognomy in 1790, identifies the old associations with metoposcopy and chiromancy as a reason why physiognomy has been denigrated in his time: 'It [physiognomy] has been treated in conjunction with subjects, now properly exploded as unworthy of attention'.[21] Moreover, he highlights the anthropocentric viewpoint as typical of the current age: 'At present, physiognomy seems to be confined to the knowledge of the moral and intellectual character of human creatures, from their external manners and appearance' (p. 412).

The Rejection of Comparative Physiognomy

Bougeant rejects comparative physiognomy, a study which establishes physical and moral similarities between humans and animals and which has its roots in (pseudo-)Aristotle's famous syllogism: lions are courageous; this man has lion's features; therefore he is courageous. Comparative physiognomy, or zoomorphism, enjoyed a revival of interest in the second half of the seventeenth century in France.[22] Della Porta's treatise with its striking engravings of half-man half-beast creations was reprinted in 1655 and 1660 (Plate 1a). Charles Le Brun's interest in animal physiognomy, which is clearly influenced by della Porta, will be considered in Chapter 2. The contemporary preoccupation with moral similarities between humans and animals is also evident in La Fontaine's *Fables* and in La Rochefoucauld's chapter 'Du Rapport des hommes avec les animaux' in his *Réflexions diverses*. Comparative physiognomy had been part of the Renaissance theory of correspondences; however, as Patrick Dandrey has argued, in the seventeenth century it was incorporated into the intellectual thought of the time in a specific way, for the comparison with animals was used to provide an external regulator, to avoid arbitrary and subjective judgements about inner and outer

man. A comparison with a third party was seen as vital to the science's objective and rational basis.[23] Zoomorphism was therefore not merely a popular fancy, but was curiously in keeping with scientific rationalism.[24]

But Bougeant goes against these principles when he states:

> Il faut faire voir, que les hommes ont dans leur Physionomie (*sans comparaison avec les autres êtres*) une preuve claire & animée de ce qu'ils sont en effet; que, par leur extérieur, on peut juger de leur intérieur; que l'assemblage de ce qui forme leur visage suffit sans autre recherche pour assurer quelle est leur ame (p. 6; italics mine).

The third party is clearly unnecessary in Bougeant's method, for the workings of human beings may be deduced solely from the features which make up their face. Bougeant acknowledges his debt to both (pseudo-)Aristotle and della Porta in his first Letter, yet he gains little from the comparative aspect in their work.

As the *Lettres* demonstrate, the tripartite form of comparison which was crucial to seventeenth-century comparative physiognomy did not continue in the eighteenth century. Instead, physiognomy appeared to rest on a two-way correspondence between the human face and the inner character. This two-way correspondence was essentially volatile, for physiognomical judgement involved guessing at a hidden inner nature from its external signs. Instead of revealing preordained correspondences, as was the case for the Renaissance physiognomist, it was now necessary to establish them.[25] The physiognomist was empowered by this, given greater authority to infer and make judgements, but equally these judgements could be far from the mark.

Foucault's concept of the sign in the Classical episteme is a useful backdrop here. Whereas in the Renaissance episteme, the sign was pre-existent in nature and lay waiting to be uncovered, Foucault claims that the Classical sign is external to the world and exists only within knowledge itself. An object which signifies is not a sign of its own accord but must be perceived as such: 'Le signe n'attend pas silencieusement la venue de celui qui peut le reconnaître: il ne se constitue jamais que par un acte de connaissance' (p. 73). Foucault's key argument is that the sign signifies its referent by representing it and that it has no function other than what it represents. François Azouvi, who is clearly influenced by Foucault, locates this shift in the nature of the sign in the work of Cureau de la Chambre.[26] In Cureau, according to Azouvi, internal motivations have ceased literally to be embodied in the physical features but instead lie hidden, to be accessed only through the mediation of external signs; however, these signs can only be activated and assume their status as signs by someone who chooses to read them. Azouvi points out that the semiology of Port Royal and the *Encyclopédie* article 'Signe' are based on a similar interpretative pattern whereby the sign is not intrinsically a sign, but becomes such in the act of interpretation.

In the light of the claims of Foucault and Azouvi, it is possible to explain the problematic nature of eighteenth-century physiognomy in semiotic terms. There is no intrinsic relationship between signifier and signified and it is dependent on the interpretation which it is given by the physiognomist. The binary nature of the sign means that the relationship between signifier and signified is a variable one.

Bougeant's anthropocentric approach is typical of eighteenth-century physiognomical thought, where animal physiognomy was less prominent than in the previous century and differently regarded. Whereas La Fevrerie in his 'Défense de la physionomie' in the *Mercure Galant* of 1702 assumes that animal comparisons are an intrinsic part of physiognomy, Pernety and de Catt hardly mention it in their debates in the late 1760s.[27] On the occasions when animals were considered in relation to humans, what was chiefly stressed was the difference and distance between them. At best, this was a humanistic vision of the dignity and potential of man, but at worst it subscribed to a dubious racial hierarchy where certain peoples were considered more bestial than others. This duality is evident in the work of Petrus Camper: bringing together his knowledge of anatomy and drawing, Camper constructs a theory of the facial angle where geometrical principles are applied to human and animal profiles in order to establish standards of ideal beauty, and this is illustrated by a series of graduated profiles ranging from the Apollo Belvedere to an orang-utang. Different races are ranked according to their degree of perfection, with the white European nearest the top and the negro nearest the bottom. Though this progression emphasises continuity between the species, what underlies Camper's principles is the attempt to distinguish 'superior' white Europeans from animals and to warn of the dangers of degeneration.[28]

The eclipse of animal physiognomy in the eighteenth century which, it has been seen, was due to the prevailing binary sign systems and also to the period's anthropocentrism, did not continue into the nineteenth century. At this time, animal comparisons once again became prominent, and this may be partly explained by the new interest in all aspects of physiognomy which was sparked by Lavater.[29] Yet the subject was reformulated to express different social preoccupations: class hierarchies rather than racial ones were justified on the grounds of morphological similarities with animals, with the lower orders being defined as bestial in appearance and behaviour.[30]

Natural Science and Sensualist Physiognomics

Starting from the outside and moving in, Bougeant's physiognomy is primarily a process of observation which involves the building up of an overall picture from individual details. He states: 'En général, c'est l'assemblage des couleurs & des traits qui forme la Physionomie' (pp. 39-40). Bougeant's method is

therefore inductive, conjectural, starting not from a set of precepts but from the selection of individual features from a seemingly endless set of possibilities. As such, his physiognomy has much in common with the empirical approaches to the natural sciences of his day.

Bougeant justifies his focus on the face with the physiological argument that the sense organs are concentrated in this area so that, in any agitation, the animal spirits rush there the most quickly. In addition, he claims that facial skin is particularly transparent, being unattached to flesh. In fact he goes so far as to suggest that physiognomy should only concern itself with physiology, that character can only be apprehended through the human body. These arguments are underpinned by Bougeant's sensualist and materialist leanings.

Bougeant suggests that each contemplation is infinitely nuanced: 'Il y a mille choses à observer dans un visage, qui dénotent chacune quelque qualité bonne ou mauvaise' (p. 35). Just as the natural scientist contemplates the endless diversity of the natural world, so Bougeant talks repeatedly of diversity in the *Lettres*, referring at one point to 'La Diversité des Caracteres, qui varient peut-être encore plus que les visages' (p. 18). His conception of infinite variety in facial types has a physiological basis, for each person's bodily configuration differs minutely from all others and this leads to a multiplicity of characters. Departing from the age-old theory of the four humoral types, Bougeant argues that the range of character is infinite, so that within a single temperament there are many different types: 'Il y a une infinité de tempéramens, qu'on peut dire sanguins, & qui ne se ressemblent point' (p. 135).

Bougeant's exposition of the diversity of character is evidently contrary to the notion of typology: if one is sensitive to the infinite variety in nature, it is difficult to engage in a process of categorisation which is necessarily finite.[31] As a result, he finds the arbitrary pairing of physical and moral qualities in previous physiognomical treatises not only inadequate but ridiculous:

> Je ne puis m'empêcher de rire, quand je vois dans tous les Ouvrages, qui traitent de la Physionomie, les Raisonnemens pitoyables, qu'on y rencontre, sur la tête grosse ou petite, le nez long ou court, l'embonpoint ou la maigreur &c. Ils attachent tous, à ces différens Signes, les mêmes attributs, dans l'espérance apparemment, que le nombre nous éblouira, & que nous ne demanderons pas compte de ce que nous trouverons attesté par beaucoup de gens (p. 217).

For Bougeant, therefore, physiognomy cannot be reduced to a crude set of generalisations but must remain a painstaking empirical study. Its principles are to be ascertained and developed not through scholarly recourse to a treatise full of examples, but rather through personal experience.

It is hardly surprising that, despite his correspondent's entreaties, Bougeant will not be drawn to define and delineate his subject, to lay down a set of universally applicable rules for his physiognomy. He explains that this is unfeasible, given the infinite variety of human beings. This might also explain

why the work is not accompanied by illustrations: these too would be too restrictive and prescriptive, providing only general types. Only once does Bougeant stray into the realm of example, in the case of eyes. Here, as has already been suggested, it is probable that he was influenced by della Porta, and the exercise must be seen as an inconsistency in his work, but an inconsistency not without significance, for it points to the problematic nature of vision. By positing a method and yet refusing to delimit, Bougeant presents physiognomy as a new and challenging possibility. Everything remains to be discovered: the individual is free to experiment, to make conjectures, to draw from experience.

The input of sensualist doctrines is apparent in Bougeant's inductive approach, in his theory that the difference of character is caused by the varying mixture of the humours rather than by the obscure workings of the soul, and in his claim that the physiognomist's apprehension of other people occurs via the senses, primarily sight, rather than through abstract metaphysical principles. Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746), which appeared in the same year as the *Lettres*, expands on this idea of a sensualist physiognomics. For Condillac, man's understanding of the world is formed by his sensations of pleasure and pain which are translated into judgements. These judgements may also be affected by memories and by associations with past experiences. He suggests that judgements of other people come about in a similar fashion to general judgements about the world and therefore that, as human beings, we cannot help being physiognomists:

> On ne peut, par exemple, fréquenter les hommes, qu'on ne lie insensiblement les idées de certains tours d'esprit et de certains caractères avec les figures qui se remarquent davantage. Voilà pourquoi les personnes qui ont de la physionomie nous plaisent ou nous déplaisent plus que les autres: car la physionomie n'est qu'un assemblage de traits auxquelles nous avons lié des idées, qui ne se réveillent point sans être accompagnées d'agrément ou de dégoût. Il ne faut donc pas s'étonner si nous sommes portés à juger les autres d'après leur physionomie et si, quelquefois, nous sentons pour eux au premier abord de l'éloignement ou de l'inclination.[32]

Condillac argues that circulating in society inevitably triggers reactions and associations, and people 'qui ont de la physionomie', who have particularly striking features, are more interesting because they generate a greater number of responses in the observer. What is unusual about Condillac's physiognomical theory is that, instead of positing a notion of intrinsic character to be uncovered by the physiognomist, other people's characters exist purely as a construction of the beholder: people are virtuous or wicked depending on the favourable or unfavourable reactions of others. Condillac indicates how subjective these judgements may be with an anecdote about Descartes who had a weakness for people with a squint because he had once been in love with such a person. The problem with Condillac's theory is that perceptions which

are clearly subjective are so rapidly transformed into moral judgements. Though Condillac appears merely to indicate a state of affairs which is in keeping with his theory of knowledge, in fact he implicitly validates physiognomical judgement by providing it with an epistemological basis. He should therefore be seen as just as much an advocate of sensualist physiognomics as Bougeant.[33] The volatility of eighteenth-century physiognomical thought, and indeed of sensualist theories of morality, again becomes apparent.

The link between physiognomy and empiricism is taken further by Antoine-Joseph Pernety. In *La Connoissance de l'homme moral par celle de l'homme physique*, Pernety adopts a global definition of physiognomy, by claiming that it is a universal science (I, 22). In other words, he suggests that a common set of 'physiognomical' principles and methods are used in many different disciplines. In particular, all people receive knowledge via their senses and make judgements by moving from manifest effects to latent causes. They then further refine their judgements by drawing comparisons between observable phenomena. Hence Pernety argues that many disciplines are inherently physiognomical: physics is the physiognomical study of nature, astronomy that of the celestial world and botany that of plants. Even history is categorised as the physiognomical exploration of the past.

PHYSIOGNOMY AND MATERIALISM

Bougeant's physiognomy also betrays materialist leanings. The complexities of a materialist physiognomics will be discussed in Chapter 4; for now I will simply set out Bougeant's theories. Bougeant asserts that the inner person is only accessible through the matter of which he or she is composed: 'On ne peut juger les hommes que par la matiere dont ils sont composez' (p. 96), and he goes so far as to state that human character is determined by physical composition, talking of 'notre assujettissement à la matière dont nous sommes composez' (p. 95). Materialist physiognomics therefore appears to exhibit something of the determinism of traditional physiognomy. Bougeant professes metaphysical ignorance, claiming that he knows nothing of the workings of the soul, and that the individual is more explicable through his or her bodily configuration than through vain speculation about impalpable essences: 'C'est donc l'organisation plus ou moins parfaite, le mélange des humeurs plus ou moins convenable, qui fait les hommes spirituels ou bêtes' (pp. 75-76). He holds that because the soul is the same in every being, it cannot be the cause of the great variety in human characters, a fact which is more readily explained by subtle differences in the temperaments. Insofar as one can talk at all of the soul, he argues that it is understandable only through bodily processes: 'Je crois qu'il n'y a qu'une façon de parler de l'ame, qui est de parler de ses

opérations entant qu'elles dépendent du corps' (p. 82). Thus Bougeant's materialism is evident from his anti-metaphysical stance, his emphasis on the body as autonomous, and the psychophysiological conception of man. Though he can still talk about inner-outer correspondences, they refer not to a dualistic relationship of spirit and matter, but to invisible and visible physiological processes.

Bougeant's materialism is developed by the most radical proponent of eighteenth-century materialism, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, in his manifesto of materialist thought, *L'Homme machine* (1748). In this polemical and often quirky work, he refers directly to Bougeant's *Lettres* and specifically endorses his physiognomy:

> Il n'est pas plus nécessaire d'être aussi grand Physionomiste que cet Auteur, [Bougeant] pour deviner la qualité de l'esprit, par la figure, ou par la forme des traits, lorsqu'ils sont marqués jusqu'à un certain point; qu'il ne l'est d'être grand Médecin, pour connoitre un mal accompagné de tous ses symptômes évidens. Examinez les Portraits de Locke, de Steele, de Boerhaave, de Maupertuis, &c. vous ne serez point surpris de leur trouver des Physionomies fortes, des yeux d'Aigle. Parcourez-en une infinité d'autres, vous distinguerez toujours le beau du grand Génie, & même souvent l'honnête Homme du Fripon.[34]

The reference to eagle eyes is obviously vestigial evidence of comparative physiognomy. La Mettrie here suggests that knowledge of character through bodily signs is as obvious and straightforward as a basic knowledge of the symptoms of illness. The parallel between physiognomy and medicine is unsurprising, given the historical precedent and La Mettrie's own medical background.[35] Bougeant and La Mettrie both reject metaphysics and take human physiology as a starting point for analysis. Their approach is empirical, based on information derived from the senses, and they share a relativist position, basing their knowledge on experience of individual cases rather than on all-encompassing systems. Moreover, both works betray an epicurean emphasis on pleasure, for La Mettrie 'cette sublime Volupté de l'Etude' and for Bougeant, the 'plaisirs infinis' of the study of physiognomy.

Later materialist thinkers, among them Diderot, deplored what they saw as the amoral ramifications of La Mettrie's arguments, and failed to acknowledge his support for social causes, especially medical reform. Yet they shared his atheism, his belief that the universe is composed of one substance and that movement is intrinsic to matter. La Mettrie's psychophysiological theories with their physiognomical underpinnings can also be traced in the work of later thinkers, particularly physicians such as Cabanis. In *Les Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802), Cabanis developed a conception of the unity of physical, mental and moral forces which must be seen to constitute a form of materialist physiognomics.

THE SCIENCE OF THE *MONDAIN*

In his advocacy of empirical physiognomics, Bougeant departs from the traditional perception of the physiognomist as an expert, shrouded in mystery. Previously, the physiognomist's role was almost indistinguishable from that of the medical practitioner, the soothsayer and the divine because they all judged the human body according to its external signs and made conjectures as to future developments based on the visual evidence in front of them. This position as unchallenged expert, as provider of unfathomable truths, placed the physiognomist apart in society. In positing physiognomy as a secular and human activity, Bougeant removes the aura of mystery and secrecy. The physiognomist, therefore, relinquishes his position as a superior or marginal figure and instead becomes a *mondain*.

The review of the *Lettres* in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* attempts to characterise this *mondain* figure by physiognomising the physiognomist-author, using the 'traits' of the text:

> L'aimable Auteur de ces *Lettres Philosophiques* est très certainement un Homme qui connoît le grand monde, & qui doit l'avoir fréquenté. Il a le coeur bon & droit, l'esprit vif, souple, enjoué. Il est galant & très poli, la vivacité de son esprit est dans une si juste proportion, qu'elle ne nuit point à son jugement. Il pense beaucoup sans être trop rêveur. Il est versé dans la plupart des Sciences, & il les aime. Il a quelque connoissance de la Chimie, & il s'est fait des idées fort justes de la Médecine, & de l'Economie animale; je ne crois pourtant pas qu'il soit Médecin. Il est versé dans l'Histoire ancienne & moderne; mais il n'est pas Historien de profession. C'est un de ces sages Pyrrhoniens qui savent douter à propos. Il ne décide que sur l'évidence; il se tait sur ce qui est au-dessus de la portée de l'Esprit humain. Il aime la vérité, il la cherche, il l'adopte par-tout où il la trouve (p. 138).

This is the epitome of the new-style physiognomist. The main qualifications are a good general education (to be a specialist would be a positive disadvantage), a knowledge of the world and social agility. Moreover, one must be well disposed towards one's fellow men and women and have a scrupulous record of personal morality. The label 'Pyrrhonien' is indicative of the speculative approach of Bougeant's physiognomist, taking each case as a separate one, refusing to rest on established 'truths'.

The format of the *Lettres* is in keeping with this new-style physiognomy. Instead of the formal treatise, it adopts the currently popular form of the philosophical letter and consists of thirty-five letters addressed to a (presumably) male friend. The tone is not so much dogmatic as intimate: instead of adopting the moral high ground of the conventional treatise, Bougeant chooses the informal epistolary form in order to flatter his readers as urbane equals, and frequently he incorporates them directly, using the 'nous' form. In this way, physiognomy is relocated in the sphere of the cultivated amateur.

According to Bougeant, physiognomy is for everyone: the contemplation of the human face is a spontaneous and universal human activity, affording 'de plaisirs infinis' (p. 18). Women too can successfully apply themselves, and may even possess a greater aptitude than men, for 'Moins occupées des Sciences que nous, elles conservent mieux cette délicatesse de sentiment, qui est d'un si grand secours dans les études de l'espece de celle-ci' (p. 53). This gendered view of physiognomy enhances the suggestion, found also in Lavater, that scholarship is a hindrance and the more 'womanly' skills of minute social observation are of greater use in its practice.

Bougeant is anxious to present physiognomy not just as spontaneous, but as cultivated seeing: it is a skill which can be improved by application and experience. But he also asserts that the true physiognomist possesses a certain innate 'gift' of vision, a view which is in keeping with certain theories of connoisseurship.[36] He states that 'Ceux qui raisonnent juste sur les Physionomies ne l'ont appris de personne, qu'ils ne sauroient y former ceux qui n'y ont point de disposition, que cette disposition ne s'acquiert point' (p. 17). Moreover, the implication is that the people with the keenest sight are those best qualified to make moral pronouncements:

> [Le physionomiste] a le secret de la Nature: il ne juge que d'après les éclaircissements qu'il tient d'elle, il ne demande à ceux qui l'environnent que les vertus dont ils sont capables, souvent il trouve à les faire valoir, il leur apprend à s'estimer, il éleve leur courage, il tire d'eux plus qu'ils n'auroient osé en espérer eux-mêmes, il les connoît mieux qu'ils ne se connoissent (p .8).

It is suggested that the true physiognomist knows others better than they know themselves. Bougeant seems here to be close to returning to the traditional conception of the physiognomist as unchallenged expert, as uncoverer of the 'secrets of nature'.

Yet Bougeant maintains that the most talented can grow in learning and appreciation through a careful training of the eye. Moreover, for a good physiognomist to form an unfavourable impression of the subject would suggest a lack of integrity: 'Les hommes sont plus fous que méchans [...] les meilleurs Connoisseurs en chaque genre sont les Juges les moins severes; ceux qui connoissent le mieux les hommes, leur pardonnent le plus volontiers leurs foibles' (p. 26). Again the parallel with connoisseurship is apparent, for it is as if judging something as unworthy were beneath the dignity of the beholder. Human beings are to be contemplated and appreciated like precious works of art.

THE PHYSIOGNOMIST AS *MORALISTE*

In Bougeant's text, the key to physiognomy is to see the intrinsic good in one's fellow human beings: 'Etudier les hommes n'est pas apprendre à les haïr,

comme vous le croïez: c'est apprendre à les supporter, & à vivre avec eux' (p. 245). Bougeant anticipates Rousseau by several years in his insistence that people be judged on their innate goodness rather than their incidental acts. He is especially critical of French *moralistes* (one imagines he means such writers as La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère) for their gloomy view of human nature: 'Je suis si persuadé de cette vérité, que je ne puis me deffendre de vous dire en passant, que les plus beaux Livres de Morale, & sur-tout de Caracteres, que nous avons en François, me choquent en ce qu'ils se bornent presque tous à dire du Mal des Hommes' (p. 250). Not all eighteenth-century writing will share this optimism: the debate at the Berlin Academy between Pernety and de Catt hinges on whether physiognomy will reveal more rogues than it does maligned saints, with some gloomy conclusions being voiced by Pernety.

Though Bougeant identifies only in passing with the *moraliste* tradition, the links between physiognomy and writing on *moeurs* or human behaviour are deep and various. Physiognomy was a standard topic of *moraliste* writing from Montaigne onwards. In the course of his lengthy essay 'De la physionomie', Montaigne gives his ambivalent verdict on the subject: 'C'est une foible garantie que la mine; toutefois elle a quelque considération'.[37] La Bruyère is similarly equivocal, though more precise, in his *Les Caractères* (1688-94): 'La physionomie n'est pas une règle qui nous soit donnée pour juger les hommes: elle nous peut servir de conjecture'.[38] His comment also seems to prefigure the more conjectural approach to physiognomy which is advocated by Bougeant. The major eighteenth-century *moralistes* — Vauvenargues, Duclos and Chamfort — also adopt Montaigne's ambivalent approach, suggesting that physiognomy is vain and ridiculous even if it also contains some essential truths.[39] The *Encyclopédie* clearly associates physiognomy with moral writing, for one of the two parts into which Jaucourt divides his entry 'Physionomie' is entitled 'morale', and its content is plagiarised from Vauvenargues. The other part, entitled 'science imaginaire', draws extensively from Buffon.

The physiognomist and the *moraliste* have much in common.[40] Both are penetrating observers of human nature, delving to the roots of the character, distinguishing between fundamental and incidental character traits, making moral pronouncements, aiming to inform and to warn. Perhaps the physiognomist lingers longer on the surface, is more concerned with the 'imprint' of character on the body's exterior, but both share a concern to project inwards. In fact, Bougeant's inductive physiognomical method places the physiognomist more than ever in the shoes of the *moraliste*. Both are located firmly in the social sphere, in close proximity to those they observe; both gather information and build up a general picture; neither are creators of overarching metaphysical systems.

Bougeant includes in the *Lettres* the portrait of a certain 'Chevalier de ***'. The tradition of inserting character sketches into physiognomical treatises was fully established by della Porta, but it originates in (pseudo-) Aristotle. It is also found in the work of Pernety and Lavater. However, Bougeant subverts the Theophrastan model of character sketch, for rather than depicting a type, he posits the existence of many characters within one, saying of the Chevalier: 'Il rassemble en lui seul mille Caracteres différens, dans lesquels il n'y en a pas un de mauvais' (p. 70). The Chevalier is made up of many different characteristics rather than just one overriding one. Rather than being a static creation, he is constantly in motion, constantly changing from one moment to the next.

BUFFON AND THE DIGNITY OF MAN

The above discussion of Bougeant's physiognomy reveals the intersection of interests of physiognomist and the *moraliste*. These can now be linked with those of the anthropologist.[41] Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707-1788), is often credited with forming the new science of anthropology and his *Histoire naturelle* (1749-1767) gives man a commanding position at the centre of nature. In the part 'De l'homme', he includes four chapters which describe the four ages of man: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. The third of these, 'De l'âge viril', is largely composed of a 'Description de l'homme' which depicts man in all his supremacy, as the height of nature's achievements. The whole of man's exterior is described: his posture, his face and especially the effects of the different passions, then his individual facial parts. Buffon then goes on to discuss fashion, and the ways in which dress can alter the appearance; he then returns to the body, giving an analysis of each body part, and finally addressing such issues as ideal proportions and variations in standards of beauty.

Buffon's 'Description de l'homme' rapidly acquired an authority as a contemporary statement on physiognomy: as seen above, a part is quoted verbatim in the Chevalier de Jaucourt's *Encyclopédie* article 'Physionomie'; Jaucourt also plundered the section on the physical effects of the passions for his article 'Passions', under the sub-heading *Peinture*; the actress Clairon recommended in her memoirs that actors study Buffon as part of their training in facial expression; Pernety and de Catt responded to him in the Berlin debates; and finally, Lavater commented on him in his *Fragments*. These writers, who reflect the diversity of Buffon's appeal, will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In the text, Buffon makes a determined effort to break with the past and establish the principles of facial expression which are relevant to his day.

The anthropocentrism which was found in Bougeant's *Lettres* is fully apparent in the 'Description de l'homme'. Man's superiority over other creatures is implicit in his exterior and his bearing:

> Tout marque dans l'homme, même à l'extérieur, sa supériorité sur tous les êtres vivants: il se soûtient droit & élevé; son attitude est celle du commandement; sa tête regarde le ciel & présente une face auguste sur lequel est imprimé le caractère & la dignité (p. 518).

Man stands tall, rather than on all fours, and his posture is emblematic of his dignity. Buffon here uses a well-established topos of moral philosophy, theology and poetry which has its roots in Ovid and Cicero.[42] Traditionally, man's upright posture was seen to be indicative of his greater proximity to heaven than that of other animals, yet Buffon's rendering is also physiognomically significant, for man looks outwards as well as upwards, surveying the world around him, and this posture gives a greater prominence to his face. This picture of man at his best may be contrasted with Buffon's unflinching descriptions of 'degenerate' races in his subsequent chapter, 'Variétés de l'espèce humaine'. Just as in Camper's work, the elevation of a certain human type is conditional upon a series of 'lesser', non-European human types.

Buffon suggests that man's entire dignity resides in his face, a dignity which is maintained in both calm and troubled states:

> Lorsque l'ame est tranquille, toutes les parties du visage sont dans un état de repos: leur proportion, leur union, leur ensemble, marquent encore assez la douce harmonie des pensées, & répondent au calme de l'intérieur; mais lorsque l'ame est agitée, la face humaine devient un tableau vivant où les passions sont rendues avec autant de délicatesse que d'énergie, où chaque mouvement de l'ame est exprimé par un trait, chaque action par un caractère dont l'impression vive & prompte devance la volonté, nous décèle & rend au dehors par des signes pathétiques les images de nos secrètes agitations (p. 519).

The face at rest is a model of proportion and harmony, the ensemble of facial parts reflecting interior calm; however, when the soul is troubled, the passions convey this invisible agitation to the exterior. The face becomes a 'tableau vivant', a moving picture, an excellent composition of vibrancy and subtlety. The process by which inner feelings are reproduced on the exterior is a delicate and refined one, but the face is sophisticated enough to depict the slightest flicker of movement. The parallels with painting here are striking: the face is like a canvas, the place where subtle nuances are rendered, and the journey from intangible to tangible passion echoes the artist's creative process. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Buffon's text was seen as an important statement on the aesthetics of facial expression, though his originality in this respect should not be overemphasised, for metaphors of the passions painting themselves on the face were commonplace in aesthetics, science and literature of the time.

Buffon sees dress as part of an elaborate process of signification. But it seems that, for him, dress can only suggest *certain* things about a person; for instance it can be extremely powerful in suggesting wealth or power. But he claims that it is to the body, and especially to the face, that one must turn for a true analysis of the self. Only two pages out of twenty are devoted to fashion and Buffon soon tires of the subject: 'Mais laissons les choses accessoires & extérieures, & sans nous occuper plus long-temps des ornemens & de la draperie du tableau, revenons à la figure' (p. 540).

THE EMERGENCE OF PATHOGNOMY

Buffon retains a fundamental dualism in that he rejects any compatibility between bodily and spiritual form. For him the soul is immaterial:

> Comme l'ame n'a point de forme qui puisse être relative à aucune forme matérielle, on ne peut pas la juger par la figure du corps ou par la forme du visage; un corps mal fait peut renfermer une fort belle ame, & l'on ne doit pas juger du bon ou du mauvais naturel d'une personne par les traits de son visage, car ces traits n'ont aucun rapport avec la nature de l'ame, aucune analogie sur laquelle on puisse fonder des conjectures raisonnables (p. 535).

Buffon rejects the Platonic notion that a beautiful soul is manifested in a beautiful body. He denies that there is any connection between the soul and bodily morphology, and hence he seems to uphold a rigorous form of dualism. His position differs fundamentally from that of Bougeant who, insofar as he conceives of a soul at all, sees it as fundamentally determined by bodily configuration. Buffon conceives of the soul as an individual essence, unlike Bougeant who considers it to be the same in all human beings and attributes individuality solely to physiological differences.

Buffon's recognition of the disparity between the soul and bodily morphology forms the basis of his rejection of a certain kind of physiognomy. He considers any attempt to deduce an intrinsic character from external features to be misguided, if not pernicious. Furthermore, the divinatory aspect of traditional physiognomy is anathema to him:

> Les anciens étaient fort attachés à cette espèce de préjugé, & dans tous les temps il y a eu des hommes qui ont voulu faire une science divinatoire de leurs prétendues connaissances en physionomie, mais il est bien évident qu'elles ne peuvent s'étendre qu'à deviner les mouvements de l'âme par ceux des yeux, du visage & du corps, & que la forme du nez, de la bouche & des autres traits, ne fait pas plus à la forme de l'ame, au naturel de la personne, que la grandeur ou la grosseur des membres fait à la pensée. Un homme en sera-t-il plus spirituel parce qu'il aura le nez bien fait? en sera-t-il moins sage parce qu'il aura les yeux petits & la bouche grande? Il faut donc avouer que tout ce que nous ont dit les physionomistes est destitué de tout fondement, & que rien n'est plus chimérique que les indications qu'ils ont voulu tirer de leurs prétendues observations métoposcopiques (p. 535).

This scathing attack highlights the prejudice and the misplaced confidence in physiognomy which Buffon believes has been displayed over the centuries.

The word 'métoposcopiques' is used pejoratively and imprecisely, highlighting physiognomy's links with discredited divinatory practices.

But though he dismisses the significance of morphology in the passage quoted above, Buffon acknowledges that there is a link between interior and exterior, between somatic and spiritual realms. He recognises that the movements of the soul can be detected in facial and bodily movement. Buffon's apparent dismissal of physiognomy must therefore be qualified: he accepts *pathognomy*, the study of the fleeting passions, whilst rejecting *physiognomy* (or morphology), the study of the permanent features. (*Physiognomy* and *pathognomy* are italicised henceforth in this book when they are used in direct opposition to each another.)

The significance of the moving facial parts was first mentioned in the (pseudo-)Aristotelian treatise *Physiognomonica*. Here, three types of physiognomy are distinguished: the study of the fixed body parts, the study of the passions in facial expression, and comparisons with animals. The second of these is acknowledged to be an important part of the science of physiognomy, but the text is more cautious about this than the other two types, and warns that facial expressions can often be deceptive because they can be controlled and feigned by tricksters and liars.[43] This assertion set a precedent for centuries, for physiognomical treatises tended to favour morphology as more reliable. Buffon's argument reverses this state of affairs by asserting that transitory facial movements reveal more about a person than the permanent features.

The term *pathognomy* is in fact slightly anachronistic for, in Buffon's day, it would chiefly have been associated with medical semiotics and the symptoms of the passions as they manifest themselves in illness; however, in 1778, Lichtenberg clarified the distinction between *physiognomy* and *pathognomy*. *Pathognomy* is defined by him in aesthetic terms as the study of the expressive signs of the passions in all their nuances:

> Wir [wollen] hier einmal für allemal erinnern, daß wir das Wort *Physiognomik* in einem eingeschränkten Sinn nehmen und darunter die Fertigkeit verstehen, aus der Form und Beschaffenheit der äußeren Teile des menschlichen Körpers, hauptsächlich des Gesichts, ausschließlich aller vorübergehenden Zeichen der Gemütsbewegungen, die Beschaffenheit des Geistes und Herzens zu finden; hingegen soll die ganze Semiotik der Affekten oder die Kenntnis der natürlichen Zeichen der Gemütsbewegungen nach allen ihren Gradationen und Mischungen *Pathognomik* heißen.[44]

Like Buffon, but unlike his opponent Lavater, Lichtenberg considers *pathognomy* to be more revealing and also more relevant to his day.

Buffon highlights the eloquence of the fleeting moment: 'On peut juger de ce qui se passe à l'intérieur par l'action extérieure, & connoître à l'inspection des changements du visage *la situation actuelle de l'ame*' (p. 519; italics mine). He draws up an aesthetics of motion, describing the individual facial parts and their degrees of expressivity. Buffon considers the nose to be

inexpressive because it is immobile, and goes so far as to claim that it is hardly noticeable. In contrast, the mobility of the eyes, the mouth and the lips means they are the most expressive parts of the face, and their bright colour with the contrast of red on white attracts the attention. This privileging of the moving features over the fixed ones is reflected in a wide variety of other writing of the period.[45]

The emphasis on the pathognomical in Buffon's text is crucial for it pinpoints a conception of facial expression which is typical of the eighteenth century as a whole but is especially so of the middle years of the century. The face is seen as moving, the mobile parts — flesh, eyes and muscles — are considered expressive and given prominence, and fleeting expressions are the most eloquent. The *jeu de physionomie*, the play of facial features, has both positive and negative connotations: Buffon's description, quoted above, focuses on the impressive performance of the fugitive effects of the passions; yet the play of facial features may also be used in a calculated way for effect, and thus appear contrived or mannered. The mobile face will be encountered many more times in this book, in relation to portraiture, facial expression in painting and theatre, and in theories of self-presentation in society. This trend towards the eloquence of the moving features was reversed in the 1770s by Lavater, who once again privileged the fixed facial parts.

THE CAVEAT

For Buffon, the word 'physionomie' has negative connotations for it is loaded with the baggage of superstition from a previous age. He fails to equate his fascination with facial movement with this term, even if this fascination is implicitly 'physiognomical' in the general sense. As such, Buffon's text exhibits a certain ambivalence, juxtaposing the distinctly physiognomical eloquence of the face with an explicit denial of physiognomy's validity. Before launching into a glorious description of the face crossed with passion, he must first distance himself both from the physiognomical tradition and also from the term 'physionomie' itself.

Similar caveats occur in a number of eighteenth-century texts on facial expression. In *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) Hogarth boldly states: 'The face is index of the mind [...] It is reasonable to believe that aspect to be a true and legible representation of the mind, which gives everyone the same idea at first sight; and is afterward confirmed in fact'.[46] Several times in the work, he refers to the eloquence of the passions upon the face, but then he draws back and warns:

> But least I should be thought to lay too great a stress on outward shew, like a physiognomist, take this with you, that it is acknowledg'd there are so many different causes which produce the same kind of movements and appearances of the features and so many

thwartings by accidental shapes in the make of faces, that the old adage, *fronti nulla fides*, will ever stand its ground upon the whole; and for very wise reasons nature hath thought fit it should (p. 126).

Baillet de Saint-Julien, in his *Lettre à Monsieur C[hardin] sur les caractères en peinture* (1753) expresses a similar mix of fascination and reservation:

Il n'y a personne qui ne se croye physionomiste; & il n'y a peut être point de science au monde plus fausse que la physionomie. Mais cette chimère n'est point inutile à la Peinture. Nous sommes convenus, dans tout ce qui regarde les productions de cet Art, de juger des choses par leur forme & leur figure extérieure.[47]

Baillet de Saint-Julien recognises something inherently physiognomical in art, yet is unable to call it by this name. This hesitation over and denial of 'physiognomy' by Buffon and his contemporaries may well be one of the reasons why scholars have identified the mid-eighteenth century as a barren period in the history of physiognomy.

The discomfort in the mid-eighteenth century with the term 'physionomie' was to some extent overcome by the use of an alternative word: 'expression'. This word was already well established in art discourse but came to have a particular resonance in the mid-eighteenth century, as will be seen especially in Chapters 2 and 3.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FACIAL MOVEMENT: PHYSIOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

Buffon's description of the movements of the face is backed up by physiological data. He draws heavily on a work by James Parsons MD, *Human Physiognomy Explain'd: in the Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion* (1747). These two lectures were delivered to the Royal Society in 1746. It is likely that Buffon came across Parsons's work through Martin Folkes, the then President of the Royal Society, to whom Parsons's lectures are dedicated.[48] Buffon's debt to Parsons has often been overlooked by Buffon specialists and by British historians of science and it is therefore important to explore this neglected link.[49]

Parsons's work occurred at a time of great experimentation on the muscles. Muscular irritability was being investigated by Albrecht von Haller and Claude-Nicolas Le Cat was examining the relationship between muscles and nerves. Moreover, other scientists were developing theories of the physiology of the passions, among them Jean-Baptiste Lallemant, Docteur Régent at the Paris Faculté de Médecine, who applied a mechanistic theory in his *Essai sur le mécanisme des passions en général* (1751). Despite this interest, *Human Physiognomy Explain'd* was one of the most comprehensive analyses of facial muscles of its day.

Parsons proposes that the principal manifestation of the passions is muscular motion, that the muscles are 'the true Agents of every Passion of the

Mind' (p. ii). Whilst holding with the Cartesian idea of the rational soul, this view breaks with Descartes's theory that it is the animal spirits which bring about the physical effects of the passions, and Parsons therefore claims that his theory is entirely new. He also claims to advance the study of anatomy through his detailed exposition of the facial muscles and his attention focuses on the muscles of the forehead, eyelids, eyes, nose, lips and cheeks. Parsons points out that these muscles work in two ways; supporting the skin and maintaining a pleasing symmetry in the face, and also expressing a range of passions.

On the subject of physiognomy, Parsons suggests that 'The Countenance is the Nuncio of the Mind', and that learning about the effects of the muscles is the best way to counter 'that trite Phrase, "*Fronti nulla fides*" for we must, from every Day's Experience, see a Face promise what we afterwards find to be the real Disposition of the Person who wears it' (p. 33). He argues that the kind of physiognomical catalogue which has developed from the features of famous people in history is untrustworthy precisely because it is created *a posteriori*, after such figures have established their character and reputation. He rejects dependence on the solid facial parts, placing value exclusively on the moving ones, namely the muscles: 'A Person with a long Chin or Nose &c. may be either of a good or bad Turn of Mind; and, on the contrary, those with the best proportioned Faces may be possessed of unhappy as well as happy Tempers: So that, let this be as it will, it is the Alteration of the Muscles alone that is capable of demonstrating the reigning Passion of the Mind upon every Kind of Face' (p. 37). In his rejection of the solid parts in favour of the moving ones, Parsons's thinking is remarkably similar to Buffon's and also typical of his age.

Buffon paraphrases a good deal of Parsons's lectures, especially where the latter outlines the role of the diaphragm as the 'principal *Instrument* of receiving and communicating the Impulses of the *Will* to the several Parts which are destined for the Expression or Publication of the Intention of that *Will* or *Mind*' (p. 34), and where he describes the differences in respiration which are brought about by Desire and Regret, leading to sighing or sobbing. He also follows Parsons as regards the grouping together of passions in terms of their physical effects and in the order in which these are described. Thus Fear, Horror and Terror are treated together, and equally Jealousy, Envy and Malevolence. Parsons also had a visual impact on Buffon's work, for the plates illustrating the lecture which represent the same woman's face under the effects of the different passions are reproduced in the *Histoire naturelle*, although these are reduced in size and rather crudely copied (Plates 2a, 2b).

Unlike Parsons, Buffon glosses over the technicalities of muscular configurations. His descriptions of the various passions are noticeably non-anatomical and read as if they were inspired by Parsons's illustrations rather

than attempts to render his anatomically dense explanations in simpler terms. Buffon's simplification of Parsons's work is understandable in terms of his own encyclopaedic project of conveying a large volume of knowledge to the non-specialist. Parsons focuses on the face alone and sees such additions as hair standing on end in the case of fear as unnecessary and detracting from the concentration of meaning in the face; however, Buffon, for all the attention he gives to the face, sees hair and also clothes as a major attribute, contributing to a person's overall significance, and he includes a lengthy discussion of the cut of a beard.

Parsons's lectures are underpinned in two ways by a concern for artists. Firstly, they highlight the possibilities and difficulties of the representation of the passions in art. In fact, they are a direct response to Charles Le Brun's *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1668). Parsons explains that his aim is to provide a 'Standard for *Physiognomy*' by exemplifying the passions. He assumes a degree of universality of the passions, for 'Ingenious Painters' will be able to adapt these passions and make small allowances for the 'Delicacy' of one sex and the 'Roughness' of the other. Parsons's second area of concern is the promotion of British artists. He was one of several physicians of the time who maintained close relations with artists, and he was a close friend of Hogarth in particular. These individuals perceived the common ground between art and medicine, and shared the hope of mutually raising the social and economic status of artists and physicians. Just as *Human Physiognomy Explain'd* brings together physiology and aesthetics, so too does Buffon's 'Description de l'homme'.

Character as Passion

It is commonly assumed that 'character' encompasses the permanent traits of the self whereas 'passion' encompasses more temporary states. Yet in many texts from the eighteenth century, character and passions are so closely linked as to be inseparable. This is partly caused by a multiplication of both characters and passions: instead of the four temperaments or finite numbers of passions arranged according to type (scholastic, Cartesian and so on) there was a strong conception of human diversity, that no two people were the same. Consequently it was thought that there were at least as many passions and characters as there were individual human beings. Bougeant posits the existence of an infinite number of characters, a claim which is based on his statement that there are many variations of the four temperaments. His character sketch of the Chevalier de *** reflects this multiplicity, for it depicts a character made up of many other characters.

As well as a multiplication of characters and passions, there is a sense that the two are one and the same thing: in the case of the Chevalier, characters are

envisaged as the fleeting and incidental parts which contribute to the individual make-up, in other words they take on the role normally ascribed to passions. Behind this description lies the theory that identity is momentary, constantly changing from one instant to the next. Hence the idea of a fixed character is no longer valid. This theory of identity as momentary can be found in many other texts of the period.

A variation on this notion of the constantly changing individual is the theory of character as a cumulative process, built up from the repeated effects of the passions. The face begins as a *tabula rasa* which gradually takes on the marks of the most frequently repeated passions. In this way, identity leaves its permanent mark upon the face, recalling the etymology of the word character, meaning 'mark' or 'imprint', and character is built up from experience of the world. It is therefore no coincidence that Buffon's description of the face is found in the section 'De l'âge viril' where man is at the peak of his physical and spiritual potency.

This recurring eighteenth-century topos is best illustrated in *Emile, ou l'éducation*, where Rousseau describes the child growing towards adulthood: 'Sa physionomie se dévelope et s'empreint d'un caractére'.[50] He later describes this process in more detail:

> On croit que la physionomie n'est qu'un simple développement de traits déjà marqués par la Nature. Pour moi, je penserois qu'outre ce développement, les traits du visage d'un homme viennent insensiblement à se former et prendre de la physionomie par l'impression fréquente et habituelle de certaines affections de l'ame. Ces affections se marquent sur le visage, rien n'est plus certain; et quand elles tournent en habitudes, elles y doivent laisser des impressions durables. Voilà comment je conçois que la physionomie annonce le caractere, et qu'on peut quelquefois juger de l'un par l'autre, sans aller chercher des explications mistérieuses, qui supposent des connoissances que nous n'avons pas (p. 516).

Rousseau's suspicion of the mystifying practices of traditional physiognomy is apparent from his last sentence. His opening assertion that physiognomy is not simply 'found' in nature also hints at a rejection of Renaissance physiognomy. Instead, for Rousseau, the development of physiognomy and character is an active process, involving self-formation and education. The study of physiognomy gains validity through this conception of the self, for Rousseau implies that a person's development and perfection should be apparent on his or her face.

It is clear that Buffon's emphasis on *pathognomy* is not just linked to aesthetics, but has broader implications for theories of character. In this period, character appears to be essentially dynamic: sometimes an unstable, unpredictable thing, shifting from one moment to the next; sometimes a progressive thing, developing over time; sometimes a malleable thing to which the individual can give control and direction. *Pathognomy* therefore, the study

of the fleeting, more aptly sums up these dynamic conceptions of character than the more static *physiognomy*.

On closer analysis, the apparent decline of physiognomy in the mid-eighteenth century gives way to a much more interesting picture, and physiognomical thought is far more prevalent than it might first appear. Despite their differences, Bougeant and Buffon address physiognomy's negative past and define a new type of physiognomy for their age. Both emphasise the man-centredness of physiognomy and both incorporate contemporary theories and methods of the natural sciences. Bougeant's physiognomy is inductive, and conjectural, involving minute observation and the collection of tiny details. His method is resistant to typology and emphasises the diversity of both the face and character, and the physiognomist is redefined as a *mondain*, a connoisseur and an autodidact but still retains the authority to make powerful moral judgements. Buffon makes a crucial distinction between *physiognomy* and *pathognomy*, indicating that only the latter is worthy of pursuit. His descriptions of facial expressions caused by the different passions, with their sound physiological basis, are of great importance in the domain of aesthetics. It transpires from Buffon's work that much of the period's writing on physiognomy does not proclaim itself as such, but instead appears under other guises, particularly the label 'expression'. Lastly, both writers highlight close links between character and passion in this period. Various 'dynamic' theories of character begin to emerge, based on the notion of identity as constantly shifting.

NOTES

1. *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 4 vols (Leipzig, 1775-8). An expanded edition was translated into French, the *Essai sur la physiognomonie, destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer*, 4 vols (La Haye, 1781-1803); Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, *Bericht von den über die Abhandlung 'Über Physiognomik' entstandenen Streitigkeiten*, in *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by Franz. H. Mautner (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1983), II, 133-38 (p.134).
2. Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage: Exprimer et taire ses émotions, XVIème-début XIXème siècle* (Paris: Rivages, 1988), p. 115, talk of 'la ruine de la physiognomonie' in the eighteenth century, with a resurgence of interest only in the late 1760s. They seem unaware of the existence of Bougeant's *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* (1746).
3. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, 15 vols (1749-67), II, 535. All subsequent references to Buffon are from this edition and volume; 'Physionomie' *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. by Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, 17 vols (Paris, 1751-65), XII (1765), 538.
4. Paul Ilie, *The Age of Minerva*, 3 vols (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), I, *Counter-Rational Reason in the Eighteenth Century: Goya and the Paradigm of Unreason in Western Europe*, chapter 9, highlights the cultural complexity of the age and provides a useful bibliographical survey.
5. Physiognomies formed an essential part of popular almanacs in the seventeenth century, and this practice persisted well into the eighteenth century. See Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire au XVIIème et XVIIIème siècles: La Bibliothèque Bleue de Troyes* (Paris: Imago,

1975), p. 167; Geneviève Bollème, *Les Almanachs populaires aux XVIème et XVIIIème siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1969).

6. The following works on the history of physiognomy are particularly recommended because of their extensive bibliographies: Elizabeth C. Evans, 'Physiognomics in the Ancient World', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 59 (1969), 1-101; Patrick Dandrey, *La Fabrique des fables: Essai sur la poétique de La Fontaine* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991), pp.183-86; Paul Delaunay, 'De la physiognomonie à la phrénologie: histoire et évolution des écoles et des doctrines', *Le Progrès médical*, 29-31 (1928), 1207-90.
7. *La Bibliothèque raisonnée*, 38 (janvier-mars, 1747), article VII, pp. 137-46.
8. *L'Année littéraire* (1760), V, 36-46.
9. 'Les Amusements d'un Jésuite: Père Bougeant, Physiognomy and Sensualist Theories', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 30 (1993), 292-310.
10. See Dieudonné Thiébault, *Mes Souvenirs de vingt ans de séjour à Berlin*, 5 vols (Paris, 1804). In the passage quoted by Sheridan (pp. 297-98), Pernetti agreed to publish the *Lettres* in his own name in order to protect Bougeant from a second exile at La Flèche. It is unclear why he still felt the need to do this at the time of publication in 1747, since this was three years after the latter's death. In addition, Thiébault talks of only three letters written by Bougeant, whereas the 1747 version contains thirty five letters. Finally, Sheridan glosses over the fact that Thiébault wrongly contrasts the 'déjà vieux' Bougeant with the 'jeune' Pernetti when their difference in age was actually only six years, but this seems to be yet more proof of Thiébault's unreliability.
11. Sheridan's assertion (p. 299) that Aristotelian comparisons recur in the *Lettres* is inaccurate.
12. *Mes souvenirs*, V, 86-91. Thiébault claims that Pernety is a cousin of Pernetti whereas most other sources state that he is Pernetti's nephew.
13. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 32-40, distinguishes four types of similitude in the Renaissance episteme: *convenientia*, *aemulatio*, *analogy* and *sympathy*.
14. As Carlo Ginzburg's seminal article has shown, physiognomy belongs to a group of disciplines with a common character, all involving the interpretation of marks or traces as signs of the past, present and future. These disciplines become separated over time, some being elevated to the highest areas of human knowledge and some being dismissed as folly and superstition. 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', *History Workshop*, 9 (1980), 5-36.
15. Courtine and Haroche, pp. 63-65.
16. See Delaunay, p. 1208.
17. Foucault's position (pp. 40-49) needs to be nuanced here. Della Porta's rejection of planetary influences and his perception of the human body as self-reflexive seems to contradict Foucault's vision of the Renaissance episteme as being ordered in terms of relations of resemblances, and to have more in common with the representational quality of the Classical sign. It may, however, be argued that his comparisons between human and animal physiognomies places him more within the Renaissance episteme, in the which case he should be seen as straddling the two.
18. For example, Girolamo Cardano's *Metoposcopia* (1558) was reprinted as: Jérome Cardan, *Metoposcopie* (Paris, 1658); Johannes ab Indagine's *Chiromantia* (1522) became Jean de Hayn, *La chiromancie et physionomie par le regard des membres de l'homme* (Paris, 1662).
19. In this respect, Cureau seems to be another figure who straddles Foucauldian epistemes.
20. The seminal work of Norbert Elias on the social semiotics of the Court of Louis XIV is of relevance here. *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).
21. 'Observations respecting the History of Physiognomy', *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, 3 (1790), 408-62 (p. 441). A rare exception to this trend is Christian Peuschel's *Abhandlung der Physiognomie, Metoposcopie und Chiromantie* (Leipzig, 1769).
22. See Patrick Dandrey, 'La Physiognomonie comparée à l'Age Classique', *Revue de synthèse*, troisième série, 109 (1983), 5-27.
23. Dandrey, *La Fabrique des Fables*, pp. 187-96.
24. Dandrey's argument conflicts with that of Courtine and Haroche (p. 109), who suggest that scientific rationalism, rather than sustaining physiognomy, causes a waning of interest. They clearly see zoomorphism as a late manifestation of Renaissance correspondences.
25. D. K. Danow, 'Physiognomy: the Codeless "Science"', *Semiotica*, 50 (1984), 157-71, suggests that physiognomy is a dated notion because modern semiotic theory 'requires that an individual utterance be grounded in a clearly adumbrated code'. Physiognomy lacks an encoder and relies on the arbitrary and subjective interpretation of an infinite number of external signs. Danow's argument highlights the problems inherent in Bougeant's two-way correspondence, but fails to address the possibility of God as encoder, which is a strong

element of Renaissance thought, and indeed of eighteenth-century deism, as well as Lavater's Christianity.

26. 'Remarques sur quelques traités de physiognomonie', *Les Etudes philosophiques*, 4 (1978), 431-48 (p. 435).
27. *Mercure Galant* (February 1702), 8-66.
28. Camper began studying the facial angle in the 1760s and lectured on the subject to artists at the Amsterdam Academy. His work was later translated into French in the *Dissertation sur les variétés naturelles qui caractérisent la physiognomonie des hommes* (Paris, 1791), and in the edition, *Œuvres de Pierre Camper qui ont pour objet l'histoire naturelle, la physiologie et l'anatomie comparée*, 3 vols (Paris, 1803).
29. The animal physiognomy in Balzac has been noted by Graeme Tytler, *Physiognomy in the European Novel: Faces and Fortunes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 250-51. Caricature also exploited animal comparisons: see Judith Wechsler, *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
30. To nineteenth-century eyes, the features of Degas's *Petite danseuse* exposed her as bestial and representative of a deviant underclass, something which wholly escapes the modern gaze. See Jean Clair, *L'Ame au corps: Arts et sciences 1793-1993*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Gallimard/Electa, 1993), 360-73.
31. Courtine argues that a notion of typology underpins the whole concept of physiognomy. 'Corps, Regard, Discours: Typologies et classifications dans les physiognomonies de l'âge classique', *Langue française*, 74 (1987), 108-28 (p. 108).
32. *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1924), p. 53.
33. Ernst Gombrich's theory of the 'physiognomical fallacy' which draws on the work of Karl Popper is equally applicable to sensualist theories. He suggests that our intense instinctual responses to the world as friendly or hostile should be exploited in artistic creation but that they should not form the basis of aesthetic judgements because of their naïve and highly subjective nature. Lichtenberg, he claims, discovered exactly this flaw in Lavater and exposed it in his *Fragment von Schwänzen* (see Chapter 7). The upshot of Gombrich's argument is that, for both the physiognomist and the art historian, there exists a danger of reading in too much and seeing what one wants to see. 'On Physiognomic Perception', in *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1963), pp. 45-55.
34. *L'Homme machine*, ed. by Aram Vartanian (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 157. La Mettrie's choice of individuals is far from arbritrary, for Locke and Boerhaave especially had an important influence on his thinking. Vartaniam (p. 71) argues that Bougeant (Pernetti) did not shape La Mettrie's materialist views since his *Histoire naturelle de l'âme* had appeared in 1745, a year before the *Lettres*, but that Bougeant's experimental and provisional outlook influenced the tone of *L'Homme machine*.
35. See Kathleen Wellman, *La Mettrie: Medicine, Philosophy and Enlightenment* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1992).
36. Carol Gibson Wood, 'Jonathan Richardson and the Rationalisation of Connoisseurship', *Art History*, 7 (1984), 38-56, indicates that the predominant view of the connoisseur in the early eighteenth century was that of a specially gifted class of persons with inborn taste, but that Jonathan Richardson established a new standard by promoting connoisseurship as a 'science' to be mastered by anyone capable of thinking and reasoning correctly. Bougeant's view of physiognomy hovers between these two conceptions of innate gift and universal skill.
37. *Essais* III, 8 ('De la physionomie') in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 1036.
38. *Les Caractères*, 'Des jugements', 31, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Julien Benda, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p. 375.
39. 'Quelques folies qu'aient écrites certains physionomistes de nos jours, il est certain que l'habitude de nos pensées peut déterminer quelques traits de notre physionomie. Nombre de courtisans ont l'oeil faux, par la même raison que la plupart des tailleurs sont cagneux.' Chamfort, *Maximes et pensées, Caractères et anecdotes*, ed. by Jean Dagen (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1968), p 98. See my Introduction for comments by Vauvenargues and Duclos.
40. This conception of a *moraliste* is based on that defined by Louis Van Delft in *Le Moraliste classique* (Geneva: Droz, 1982).
41. Care must be taken with the term 'anthropology': in Buffon's day, the word was still associated with the study of anatomy. Only later in the century does the term acquire the significance of the science of mankind. The parallels between anthropology and physiognomy are explored by Andreas Käuser, 'Die anthropologische Theorie des Körperausdrucks im 18. Jahrhundert: Zum wissenschaftshistorischen Status der Physiognomik', in *Leib-Zeichen:*

Körperbilder, Rhetorik und Anthropologie im 18. Jahrhundert, ed. by Rudolf Behrens and Roland Galle (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), 41-60.

42. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 84-6; Cicero, *De natura deorum* II, 56. Montaigne (p. 463) turns the topos on its head, questioning man's superiority over the animals by pointing out that camels and ostriches have longer necks and are therefore closer to heaven.
43. *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. by W. D. Ross, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), VI, 801-14 (p. 805).
44. *Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen zu Beförderung der Menschenliebe und Menschenkenntnis* (1778), in *Schriften und Briefe* II, 86.
45. Vandermonde's *Essai sur la maniere de perfectionner l'espèce humaine*, 2 vols (Paris, 1756), an early appeal for improved material conditions for the poor, includes a description of the ideal human being. The eyes and mouth are considered the most expressive, whereas 'Le nez est la partie la moins parlante du visage', and 'Les joues sont des parties du visage qui n'ont presque point d'expression' (I, 36, 38). Herder points out that the nose is inexpressive because it is untouched by the soul: 'Die Nase als Nase sagt freilich nichts: sie hat was wir eigentlich Reiz nennen, nicht, weil sie nicht von der Seele belebt werden kann'. *Plastik*, in *Werke*, ed. by Wolfgang Pross, 3 vols (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1987), II, 401-542 (p. 455). Diderot, describing the Curé de la Chevrette in his letter to Sophie Volland of 30 September 1760, is surprised to find that a man can have an expressive nose: 'Il n'y a pas d'homme dont les passions se peignent plus vivement sur son visage; c'est peut-être le seul qui ait le nez expressif; il loue du nez, il blâme du nez, il décide du nez, il prophétise du nez'. *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Roger Lewinter, 15 vols (Paris: Club français du livre, 1969), IV, 868.
46. *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. by J. Burke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), p. 125.
47. p. 17. Herder also twice attempts to detach himself from physiognomy in his *Plastik* (*Werke*, II, 450-51, 513).
48. On Buffon's relations with England, see Jacques Roger, *Buffon: Un Philosophe au Jardin du Roi* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), pp. 70-72.
49. Roger does not mention Parsons in his discussion of the 'Description de l'homme' (chapter 16) and, though he reproduces the plate from the *Histoire naturelle* which is derived from Parsons's illustrations (p. 332), he fails to identify its original source; Shearer West's otherwise excellent article omits the connection with Buffon: 'Polemic and the Passions: Dr. James Parsons's "Human Physiognomy Explain'd" and Hogarth's Aspirations for British History Painting', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 13 (1990), 73-89.
50. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, ou l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, 5 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1969-95), IV, 490.

CHAPTER 2

THE LEGACY OF LE BRUN

Charles Le Brun's *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* is one of the most comprehensive and influential analyses of facial expression in painting: through both text and image, it synthesises a contemporary Cartesian physiology of the passions and pre-existing expressive traditions in painting and rhetoric. The lecture, which was first delivered to the Paris Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1668, had a resonance in art theory and practice for over two centuries, and the text and its accompanying illustrations were widely reproduced, both as a whole and in parts. As well as being of use to practising artists, Le Brun's work reached a non-specialist audience through its incorporation into the *Encyclopédie* entry 'Dessin'.

Le Brun's lecture — in terms of its content and its history — mirrors patterns and progressions in the history of physiognomy which were outlined in Chapter 1. But beyond this, it raises a set of issues exclusive to aesthetics and artistic representation which are the focus of much of this book. The theory and practice of expression in the visual arts has its own unique history, shaped by institutional and social factors. This chapter looks back to the seventeenth century in order to make sense of developments which took place in the middle of the eighteenth century in France.

This chapter aims to construct a 'Le Brunian paradigm'. It looks beyond the historical facts of Le Brun's influence and sees his work as characteristic of a particular aesthetic and mode of signification. Above all, his lecture is governed by a logic of restriction and reduction. I show that this is a result of Le Brun's adherence to the principle of decorum, to his rigorous selection of the most fitting or characteristic elements of a composition. Recent semiotic interpretations have stressed the dependence of Le Brun's lecture on the word.[1] My account, however, stresses not so much legibility as functionality: by restricting the range of passions and by emphasising their more extreme manifestations, Le Brun's work achieves an extraordinary clarity and, moreover, the boldness and simplicity of his line drawings make them easily reproducible didactic models. It is these aspects more than anything else which account for the work's durability. Jennifer Montagu's study of Le Brun is a painstaking piece of art historical research and a vital reference.[2] Her interpretation takes a fairly straightforward historical line, focusing on the intentions of Le Brun and his successors. The approach of this chapter is somewhat different: instead of dealing with the fraught issue of intentionality, it concentrates on the lecture's reception, showing which aspects of the lecture

struck the imagination of writers and artists, and how it was shaped by some relatively chance factors. The emphasis is not on how Le Brun might have envisaged his lecture, but on 'Le Brun' as he appears through the lecture to his contemporaries and successors, and this perspective challenges some of the assumptions underpinning Montagu's analysis.

Le Brun's lecture on expression is an excellent example of the potential divergence between intention and reception. The work itself has never been and could never be an organic whole.[3] The lecture was given twice, once in 1668 and once before Colbert in 1678, and on the second occasion new illustrations were added. Even so, scholars remain unsure of exactly how the drawings were incorporated into the lecture.[4] The text of the lecture may also be unreliable because the transcript was only published years afterwards in 1698 by Picart. Moreover, the sketches for the lecture form several distinct types: the flat, front-on diagrammatic heads which form the basis of Le Clerc's 1698 edition and the mixture of simple oval outlines, and shaded, almost three-dimensional three-quarter profiles which form Picart's edition (Plates 3a, 3b, 4a). The latter are either based on preparatory sketches for Le Brun's actual paintings or are sketches made after the finished paintings, largely taken from those depicting the Life of Alexander. For example, the original for *La Crainte* (Plate 4a) is a head in Le Brun's painting *Les Reines de Perse aux pieds d'Alexandre*. Other printed versions tend to reproduce only a selection of the drawings and not necessarily in a particular order. Audran's edition uses only the three-dimensional heads and their naturalism is deliberately heightened through shading and modelling (Plate 4b). This edition, like many subsequent ones, also omits the text. Thus Le Brun's original work was plundered and given specific and localised meaning according to publishers' budgets and markets.

Le Brun's drawings, now in the Louvre, are striking for their sketchy, provisional nature. They suggest a theory very much in the process of being worked out. This in itself seems hard to reconcile with the suggestion that the lecture on expression epitomises the very worst of academic dogmatism.[5] It also makes it extremely difficult to plot out a 'definitive' Le Brun. Critics nevertheless tend to opt for a refined interpretation of Le Brun's system, but in so doing, they fail to account for significant contradictions within the work.[6] For example, the lecture is usually presented as innovative and modern, influenced by the radical Cartesian theory of the passions, yet this is hard to square with the evidence that Le Brun was working within a pervasive iconographical tradition. Some of his heads bear an unmistakable resemblance to well-established models of expression: his sketch of 'La Douleur aiguë' is derived from one of the heads from the *Laocoön*, and that of 'Le Ravissement' closely resembles Raphael's *Galatea* (Plate 13b). We must recognise that, if

his theories were novel, some of the results of his theories show a seemingly incongruous conformity to tradition.

Given these gaps and inconsistencies, it seems most meaningful to investigate how Le Brun was himself systematised and made coherent by others. It is therefore this derivative and yet coherent 'Le Brun' which is the focus of the present chapter. Regardless of his ostensible intentions, Le Brun succeeds in formulating the tightest, most streamlined theory of expression of his age.[7] Crucially, his work gathers all discourse on expression around one thing, the human face and head. What is more, it sets up the passions as fully autonomous. In these two respects — in the focus on the head alone and in the exclusively pathognomical imperative — Le Brun defines the terms and sets the conditions for discussion throughout the following century.

Physiognomy and Representation

To talk of physiognomy in art is to suggest many things at once. Physiognomical thought is embedded in the assumptions and practices of representational art: the Neo-Platonic tradition which so profoundly shapes Western art theory conceives of the art object as the embodiment of an ideal form, a greater beauty which lies beyond the manifest one.[8] This may be a reflection of ideal forms in nature or of an image in the artist's mind, but the aspiration beyond the material sphere towards a higher 'truth' is deeply ingrained in the Western tradition. In this context, representation itself involves some kind of dualism, consisting of a dialogue between surface and depth, form and essence. This assumption also shapes the task of the beholder where interpretation is assumed to involve a journey from the material object to its 'meaning'.

Representation of the human figure in art is governed by another physiognomical imperative. As well as reflecting an aesthetic ideal beyond physical reality, the outward form of the body *must* convey some inner character or mental state because the signification process depends on it. Surface must be true to essence, as is revealed in Hogarth's comment that art cannot represent a hypocrite.[9] Here, of course, Hogarth raises the additional question of the ethical purity of art. Generations of artists have agonised over how to depict the complex psychology of Judas Iscariot or figures such as Socrates where there is patently a discrepancy between outward form and inner nature. Indeed, the anecdote of the physiognomist Zopyrus and Socrates which was first related by Cicero in *De Fato* and the *Tusculan Disputations*, is a recurring topos of the physiognomical treatise. The philosopher was considered to have the face of a wicked man and yet he claimed to have overcome this by strenuous self-discipline and self-improvement.

In its broadest sense, the attainment of physiognomical 'truth' consists in the accurate projection of signals to the beholder. Sometimes this is a straightforward case of recognition. Socrates tended to be portrayed with a bald head, a protruding forehead and a bulbous nose, a practice which reveals how easily physiognomy can slide into iconography: a bulbous nose 'stands for' the philosopher just as a key represents St. Peter, not so much revealing the inner workings of his mind as forming a point of identification for the spectator. Over the years, depiction of the apostles, figures from Classical mythology, Greek philosophers and Roman emperors relied on certain conventions, some of which may have been based on original portraits and enhanced by literary descriptions. The philosophers depicted in Raphael's *School of Athens*, for instance, are clearly identifiable to the initiated.

Physiognomy, or morphology, as the study of form and character, of stasis and essence, has close links with both portraiture and caricature. Particularly in its association with the latter, it has often been relegated to the margins of artistic production. In contrast, *pathognomy* which is linked with action and the representation of the passions, is essential to what was long seen as the highest form of painting, namely history painting. Since Aristotle's declaration in his *Poetics* that art depicts human action, artistic theory and practice has centred on the passions and the expression of the emotions. Expression offers a supreme technical and intellectual challenge to the artist, that of rendering the essentially fleeting aspects of the human form within a fixed medium. Moreover, it encompasses the complex philosophical issue of how the emotions work in art.

Many artists and theorists, of course, did not see *physiognomy* and *pathognomy* as mutually incompatible. Leonardo da Vinci explored both facial expression and caricature in his studies of grotesque heads. Lomazzo combined his study of the physical effects of the passions with the theory of the temperaments.[10] Humoral theory was still an important aspect of painting in the seventeenth century, as can be seen from the theoretical works of Félibien and Testelin, though this is something which escapes the modern viewer who is unacquainted with this forgotten lexicon of bodily symbolism.

Le Brun too produced a lecture on physiognomy alongside his lecture on expression.[11] The lecture is reflective of the vogue for comparative physiognomy in the mid-seventeenth century which was discussed in Chapter 1 and in particular is a response to Gianbattista della Porta's famous work on physiognomy which was published in French in 1655 and 1665 as *De la physionomie humaine*. Le Brun's haunting hybrid animal-human heads are clearly inspired by della Porta's studies (Plates 1a, 1b). But as well as incorporating the (pseudo-)Aristotelian theory of correspondences, Le Brun relates animal characteristics to Cartesian physiology and the principles of

geometry, drawing triangles and parallel lines over different animal faces. The intersection of lines drawn along the upper eyelid relates to the position of the pineal gland. The lecture also includes a study of the heads of ancient rulers and philosophers such as Nero and Aristotle, whose characters were well established. Le Brun suggests that their innate character is revealed in the relative slope of their eyes, upwards suggesting spirituality, downwards suggesting bestiality.

In some respects it is curious that Le Brun should devote attention to comparative physiognomy. The principle behind the lecture on physiognomy, namely that man has animal-like qualities, is curiously at odds with the humanistic ideal of the Académie which was to depict man in an ideal form. And yet it was not regarded as bizarre that Le Brun should incorporate such ideas into the Academic teaching programme.[12] Critical opinion varies over whether the lectures on expression and physiognomy should be seen as complementary or not.[13] The two lectures, despite their methodological parallels, work in ideologically opposing directions, and therefore must be seen as separate. The lecture on expression is much more in line with the development of academic doctrine, more in the vanguard of academic thinking than the one on physiognomy which must be seen as a project with a much more localised significance. The latter was successful with contemporaries because of the current popularity of the subject and was given intellectual weight through its reliance on Cartesian physiology.

But by the eighteenth century the two lectures were perceived very differently. The lecture on expression formed an essential part of art theory and practice, whereas the lecture on physiognomy, apart from Antoine Coypel's reverential evocation of Le Brun's ideas in his lectures to the Académie, attracted no interest at all.[14] The lecture on physiognomy seems to have been left untouched until it was resurrected by Morel d'Arleux in 1806 as part of the renewed enthusiasm for comparative physiognomy in the wake of Lavater.[15] This state of affairs reflects the changes in physiognomical thought outlined in Chapter 1: comparative physiognomy, apart from a few isolated examples, is entirely abandoned and the theory of temperaments is eclipsed, whilst the expression of the passions becomes the central issue.

It is therefore legitimate at this point to dispense with Le Brun's lecture on physiognomy as having no relevance to the period in question. Nevertheless, the abandoning of this part of Le Brun's theories is indicative of a general tendency, for the lecture on expression too was pared down by Le Brun's successors and survived in the eighteenth century in a very partial form.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSION IN ACADEMIC DOCTRINE

In Le Brun's day, expression had a specific meaning which originated in Renaissance Italy and was an essential part of what Rennslaer Lee has termed the 'humanistic theory of painting'. Deriving from principles in Aristotle's *Poetics*, it involved the depiction of the passions in an ideal human form. A process of engagement with the viewer through empathy was also implied, and Horace's maxim that the artist should move through being moved was frequently cited: 'si vis me flere dolendum est/primum ipse tibi'.[16] The theory also incorporated Horace's assertion that painting should possess the eloquence of poetry so that the silent figures in a painting should appear to be speaking. This theory was fuelled by ancient treatises on rhetoric which stressed the importance of gesture and facial expression in conveying meaning.

Expression in Renaissance and post-Renaissance Italy was universally considered important, and was discussed in particular by Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci and Lomazzo; however, it had no universally accepted specific sense, and these theorists treated it in conjunction with their other theories rather than as a separate entity.[17] Seventeenth-century French theorists adopted many of the precepts of the Italians, but they did much more to define and delineate their terms.[18] In *L'Idée de la perfection de la peinture* (1662), Fréart de Chambray established a discursive space for expression by making it, along with invention, proportion, colour and composition, a category by which works of art can be assessed. Subsequent treatises adopted this pattern of categorisation and it was replicated well into the eighteenth century, even if the categories themselves varied slightly according to the individual theorist.[19] Almost without exception, the works had a section on expression.

In the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, founded in 1648, expression became one of the pillars of Academic doctrine. Yet in many ways, expression acquired a status above the other categories, even the much vaunted *dessin* or composition. It was considered both a fundamental achievement and the ultimate standard of judgement of a work of art. Fréart de Chambray states:

> Mais comme les trois premieres parties [l'invention, la proportion, la couleur] sont tres-necessaires à tous les Peintres, cette quatriesme, qui regarde l'expression des mouvemens de l'esprit, est excellente par dessus les autres, et tout à fait admirable: car elle ne donne pas seulement la vie aux Figures par la representation de leurs gestes et de leurs passions, mais il semble encore qu'elles parlent et qu'elles raisonnent [...] De là nous pouvons conjecturer combien il est important que cette partie de l'expression, qui est la plus excellente de la Peinture, soit accompagnée d'un jugement, et d'une circonspection particuliere; puisque c'est par elle que l'on connoist la qualité de l'esprit du Peintre.[20]

Expression is understood as a sort of life-giving force within painting, as that which makes inanimate figures seem to speak. De Chambray also stresses the

importance of 'jugement' in the painter, thereby associating expression with *esprit*, the intellectual and spiritual qualities of the artist.

Expression was particularly associated with history painting since this genre, as it was defined by Félibien in his *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (1668) involved idealised, general human subjects, noble passions and narrative action. Since history painting was considered the pinnacle of artistic achievement, there was a hierarchical endorsement of Fréart's assertion that expression is the ultimate achievement in a painting. As has many times been recognised, the Académie in the seventeenth century was seeking to establish itself as distinct from the guilds, and was therefore anxious to elevate painting beyond the level of manual craftsmanship to a level with the other liberal arts, especially poetry.[21] Intrinsic to the development of the French Académie was also a yearning to recreate the intellectual atmosphere of the Renaissance where the painter was also conceived as a poet, and to recreate the values and practices of the Italian academies of the Cinquecento, especially Vasari's Accademia del Disegno in Florence and the Accademia di San Luca in Rome.[22] The promotion of expression, with its intellectual content, had thus a political as well as an aesthetic dimension: it enhanced the status of the artist, no mere craftsman but an equivalent of the scholar.

Le Brun's definition of expression at the start of his lecture alludes to its different meanings:

> L'Expression [...] est une naïve & naturelle ressemblance des choses que l'on veut représenter: Elle est nécessaire & entre dans toutes les parties de la Peinture; un Tableau ne sçaurait être parfait sans l'Expression; c'est elle qui marque les veritables caracteres de chaque chose; c'est par elle que l'on distingue la nature des corps; que les figures semblent avoir du mouvement, & que tout ce qui est feint paroit être vrai. Elle est aussi bien dans la couleur que dans le dessein; elle doit entrer dans la representation des païsages, & dans l'assemblage des figures [23]

Crucial to Le Brun's definition, as with Chambray, is that expression gives a painting its perfection: it animates a lifeless canvas, giving definition and movement, and persuading the beholder of its 'truth'. It is something mysterious and intangible, involving the communication of both meaning and emotion to the spectator through a variety of means. The phrase 'tout ce qui est feint paroit être vrai' alludes to the rhetorical power of painting, an ability to persuade the beholder beyond artifice.

Le Brun points out that expression 'entre dans toutes les parties de la Peinture', and he mentions colour and composition (the grouping of figures) as other elements where expression can be conveyed. Nor is expression confined to human forms, for he suggests that it can also be present in landscape painting. This is what Le Brun meant by *expression générale*: all the elements of a picture conspired to reflect one specific mood or character, such as joy or sadness. It was Poussin who first explored this idea by drawing on the Ancient

Greek theory of the musical modes. In a well-known letter to Chantelou, Poussin suggests that just as different modes were thought to have an intrinsic emotional character, so that, for example, the Ionic mode was joyful and the Lydian melancholy, so painting could conform to a similar scheme of general moods or characters.[24] There is a strong parallel here with the five orders of Classical architecture which were also deemed to have distinct expressive characters.[25]

Le Brun adopted several of Poussin's theories of *expression générale* in his other lectures to the Académie.[26] But paradoxically, given the lecture's title, he has little to say about it in the *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* for, near the beginning of his lecture, he states his intention to tackle a different aspect of expression, namely the representation of the passions. It is this which he refers to as *expression particulière*. He comments 'L'expression est aussi une partie qui marque les mouvemens du Coeur, et qui rend visible les effets de la Passion'.[27] In this theory of expression, various figures in a painting were required to show the effects of the passions through a legible code of gesture and facial expression. It drew on ancient treatises on rhetoric, especially those of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian which laid out the precepts of *actio* or the art of bodily persuasion. These works, particularly Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, went into some detail as regards the movements which the orator should execute in order to give a convincing performance, and these instructions for orators were applied to painted figures. However, until Le Brun's lecture, no-one had attempted to systematise these codes of bodily motions for the benefit of practising artists. As a result of Le Brun's lecture, the representation of the passions came to dominate the whole theory of expression, eclipsing general expression; however, it is important to remember that in the seventeenth century it was considered to be only a part of expression.

Perhaps the most obscure aspect of Le Brun's initial definition of expression is the statement where he links expression with resemblance; in other words, he suggests that expression is to do with the representation of things in their true likeness. The statement, 'C'est elle qui marque les veritables caracteres de chaque chose; c'est par elle que l'on distingue la nature des corps', builds on this idea by suggesting that it is expression which conveys the salient characteristics of an object, that which permits it to be most easily identified and distinguished from other objects. In fact Le Brun is drawing here on the principle of decorum, the idea that the artist should portray what is most typical or appropriate in a given situation. Decorum was important in rhetoric, for the persuasiveness of an argument was thought to be dependent on the orator's selection of the appropriate argument, tone of voice, and so on. Such a criterion was applied to the arts so that, in the case of

painting, the artist's selection of detail was viewed as the key to the persuasiveness of the image. Decorum was discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics* and in Horace's *Ars Poetica*. Horace explained that Medea should be portrayed as fierce and Orestes as sorrowful because these were the characteristics by which they are most known and therefore most knowable. To depict these figures as other than this would result in irreparable loss of meaning: Medea would quite simply no longer be Medea and Orestes no longer Orestes. These theories, taken up and developed by Alberti, insisted upon the conformity of all elements in a picture; appropriate dress, behaviour and proportions of figures in relation to themselves and to each other.[28]

At the Académie, decorum was discussed in relation to historical accuracy, the most famous example being the argument between Philippe de Champaigne and Le Brun over the absence of camels in Poussin's *Rebecca and Eliezer* although they were specifically mentioned in the Old Testament account. But decorum was also vital to the notion of expression and it will be seen how central it is to Le Brun's delineations of the passions in his lecture and how it shaped subsequent discourse on the passions.

Up till now I have considered the place of expression in art theory; however, practising artists were probably most heavily influenced by certain exemplary painters. Above all others was Poussin, who was revered as a theorist and whose paintings were hailed as expressive masterpieces.[29] Félibien's Life of Poussin in his eighth *Entretien* praises the expressive qualities of Poussin's painting:

> Par la *vivacité* dont il parle, il entend cette vie & cette forte expression qu'il a si bien sçû donner à ses figures, quand il a voulu representer les divers mouvemens du corps, & les differentes passions de l'ame [...] Il n'y a point de figure qui ne semble parler, ou faire connoître ce qu'elle pense, ou ce qu'elle sent.[30]

Here the qualities of life, movement and eloquence are all observed.[31] Besides Poussin, painters looked, as so often, to Italy. Domenichino and Raphael were seen as paragons of expressivity, and the latter received eighteen points for expression out of a possible twenty in Roger de Piles's *Balance des peintres*.[32] Le Sueur too, dubbed the 'French Raphael', was believed to have achieved perfection in his *Life of St. Bruno* sequence. All these painters were seen to exemplify, almost to personify expression, and were upheld as models for emulation.

LE BRUN'S *CONFÉRENCE*: A 'RACCOURCI' OF THE THEORY OF EXPRESSION

It should be apparent from the above discussion that the *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* is a misnomer: in fact Le Brun rapidly dispenses with *expression générale*, the unified emotional character of the picture, in order to devote himself exclusively with *expression particulière*, the

representation of the passions by human figures. The lecture focuses solely on the visible manifestations of the passions of the soul and the ways in which artists can render these. This tendency towards paring away and stripping down is characteristic of the lecture as a whole.

Le Brun further telescopes his lecture by limiting his discussion of *expression particulière* to the head and face alone. The body seems to be an afterthought, consigned to a few short comments in his conclusion. Since the Renaissance, the representation of the passions had traditionally involved both facial and bodily movements.[33] For example, in his eighth *Entretien*, it is Poussin's figures rather than his heads that Félibien praises for their expressivity. But Le Brun was the first art theorist to consider facial expression independent of gesture and bodily expressivity, and his emphasis on the head at the expense of the body had enormous implications for the subsequent development of the theory of expression.

Le Brun's focus on the head may be interpreted in Cartesian terms. Indeed, the lecture draws heavily on Descartes's *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649), both in its taxonomy of the passions (some passages are directly lifted from Descartes), and also in its physiological reasoning. The head is the part of the body closest to the soul and the intellectual faculties. In this sense it is the least 'bodily' part of the body. Likewise, Le Brun's drawings are radically separated from the body: sometimes featuring the shadow of a neck or a shoulder, they are more often detached, decapitated, free-floating, almost souls in themselves. The lecture is a response to the intellectual challenge of rendering explicit the intangible workings of the soul. Le Brun's fine line drawings evoke the spiritual qualities of *disegno* and yet the act of drawing itself is a making flesh. In this way the paper surface becomes the pineal gland, the interface of body and soul. But the drawings are barely flesh, their thin, linear quality constantly suggesting a retreat from the physical and a refuge in the spiritual.

The preface to the Picart edition evokes the incorporeal quality of the drawings as 'n'étant composé que de simples traits'. Line was seen by the Poussinistes as intellectually superior to colour, being linked to the concept of *disegno*, or the conception within the artist's mind of pure form. Colour was conceived as having merely an emotional effect and yet this emotion was not equated with the passions.[34] Despite Le Brun's mention of colour in his initial definition, it has no place within the scheme of the lecture. His outlines are not fleshed out through the use of colour, and blushing and pallor are not examined as indicators of passion. In his neglect of colour, Le Brun also replicates Descartes's mechanical physiology which locates the emotions in the nervous system rather than the workings of the blood and the humours. Though the expressive qualities of colour continued to be of theoretical importance, with

matters coming to a head in the quarrel between the Rubénistes and the Poussinistes, Le Brun effectively bans colour from *expression particulière.*

Even the face as an expressive forum is stripped to a minimum. Le Brun's theory gives the greatest significance to the eyebrows and in this he may well be drawing on Quintilian: all the passions can be divined from the relative height or shape of the brow. Mild passions produce an upward movement whereas 'les passions les plus farouches & les plus cruelles' move the eyebrow down. Simple passions produce simple movements and mixed passions produce complex ones, pushing the eyebrow in contrary directions. It has been suggested that Le Brun's focus on the eyebrow is a form of metonymy.[35] In fact, in semiotic terms, his work is more understandable as synecdoche than metonymy, being an abbreviation rather than the abstract symbolisation of an object.

The whole tendency of Le Brun's lecture is towards abbreviation. It is Testelin, the Secretary of the Académie, who evokes the *raccourci* image in his survey of expression in the Académie's teaching programme. He calls on Apuleius: 'Suivant ce que dit Appulée, que l'homme se montroit tout entier en sa tête, et qu'à la verité, si l'homme est dit le raccourci du monde entier, la tête peut bien être dite, le raccourci de tout le corps'.[36] Le Brun's focus on the face follows this idea of short-cut, or shorthand, developing in his whole schema of the passions a sort of minimalist physiognomics.

Just as Descartes categorises six main 'passions primitives', namely admiration, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness, from which complex passions are derived, so Le Brun defines a limited number of passions and movements. He blurs the distinction between the scholastic division of the passions into concupiscible and irascible, and the Cartesian division into simple and mixed, but does not attempt more than a cursory subdivision of the latter. This streamlining contrasts with Cureau de la Chambre's capacious and incomplete *Les Characteres des passions* (1640-62) which attempts an exhaustive classification of the physical effects of the passions.[37] Le Brun's work is much more representative of the intellectual thought of his time, with its emphasis on clarity and *a priori* reasoning.

This approach results in a highly stylised physiology, a purely symbolic definition of the face.[38] In fact, Le Brun was subsequently criticised for his lack of physiological accuracy.[39] James Parsons's lectures, *Human Physiognomy Explain'd: in the Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion* (1747) consciously draw from Le Brun's own lecture in their exposition of the facial changes caused by various named passions, and also in their artistic motivation. And yet they rework Le Brun's expressive formulations in the light of recent scientific discoveries about muscular motion. Parsons finds several of his postulates to be physical impossibilities:

Had a certain great Man been learned in this Part of Anatomy, he would have made fewer serve his Purpose, and not allow'd different Motions to different Parts of the *Occipito-Frontalis* at the same time; nor have made the Wrinkles of the Forehead Longitudinal, which should have been transverse or horizontal, by the Action of this Muscle (p. iii).

In particular, he claims that Le Brun's theory of complex eyebrow movements is 'something Nature never intended' and 'an Exaggeration which renders any Figures preposterous' (p. 61).

Le Brun's method is an *a priori*, deductive one; Parsons's method is the reverse, working from the outside in. His lectures are assiduously backed up by empirical evidence: hence the eyes and mouth are wide open in a state of fear because this makes the senses more active (an open mouth improves hearing), which consequently helps the individual to escape danger. Parsons's approach clearly reveals the input of sensualist theories and of Baconian science. The difference between Le Brun and Parsons is, therefore, not so much the result of scientific 'progress' as a complete reversal of method.[40]

Le Brun's emphasis is wholly in keeping with the Académie's aspiration towards a more intellectual, spiritual kind of art. In the drawings, the passions acquire a permanence which the human subject is denied. In fact, there is a curious reversal of the categories of *physiognomy* and *pathognomy* as they have been understood up till now: for Le Brun, abstract and incidental passions become permanent, personalised embodiments, whilst permanent character traits are pushed to the periphery. These petrified passions call for a re-evaluation of the term pathognomy: rather than being represented as fleeting and incidental, they have an awed sense of permanence. The Le Brunian aesthetic is therefore one of stillness, restriction and clarity, something which will contrast with a pathognomy of swiftness and nuance to be discussed in the next chapter.

Le Brun posits a very extreme form of pathognomy whereby the passions are totally segregated from the person, from any kind of individual characteristic. In many of his drawings, Le Brun abstracts the facial features to such a degree that they are still recognisable as faces but are not actual human beings. Purged of their individuality, they are ageless, sexless, rankless, prototypes which are universally applicable to all facial types. Once again the body absents itself, giving space to the incorporeal passions. Yet this occurs by default rather than by Le Brun's intention, for his last sentence reads: 'Lorsque ce sera à mon tour de parler dans cette Assemblée, je tâcherai de vous entretenir de la Phisionomie, et des effets differens que causent les Passions selon la diversité des sujets qui les reçoivent'.[41] In other words, he suggests that physiological differences affect the way passions are felt and expressed. But in fact scholars have not revealed any such lecture, and so it was the lecture on expression alone which shaped the thought of succeeding

generations. The passions became the exclusive focus of the discourse on expression at least until the mid-eighteenth century, eclipsing discussion of the temperaments.

In contrast, Le Brun's contemporaries saw the passions as inseparable from the human subject. They were accustomed to thinking of the passions as conditioned by the triad of age, sex and rank. This can be seen in Félibien's sixth *Entretien* where the author, comparing audience reactions at the theatre, claims that older people are less moved by the spectacle than younger ones. Similarly, he argues that 'les hommes graves & de qualité' are more guarded in their reactions than 'le vulgaire' who laugh without restraint (VI, 209). There are two crucial assumptions in Félibien's argument: firstly, the passions are actually felt differently by the various social groups because of physiological differences, and secondly, there is a logical conformity between the passion and its outward sign. Hence Félibien can instruct the artist: 'Il faut sçavoir donner les mouvemens de la joye selon l'action que l'on represente, conformément à l'âge & à la condition des personnes que l'on peint'. It will be seen in Chapter 3 how these two assumptions are explicitly challenged by Watelet. Curiously, Le Brun's lecture suggests a greater universality of the passions which was of great relevance to the following century.

The disappearance of the temperaments within Le Brun's lecture marks an important departure from tradition. Lomazzo's *Trattato* includes explorations of the four humoral types alongside his theories of facial expression. Testelin also evokes the temperaments within the study of expression, arguing that the passions can take on very different forms depending on the constitution:

> L'on remarquera pour la fin, qu'il n'est pas possible, de prescrire precisement toutes les marques des differentes passions, à cause de la diversité, de la forme, & du temperament: qu'un visage plein ne forme pas les mêmes plis que celui qui sera maigre & desséiché, un gros oeil élevé a des marques bien differentes de celui qui sera petit & enfoncé. Le Bilieux a les mouvemens tout autre que le flegmatique & le sanguin; semblablement le stupide agit tout au contraire de celui qui est bien sensé; qu'ainsi le Peintre doit avoir égard a toutes ces differences, pour conformer les expressions des passions au caractere des figures, à la proportion & aux contours.[42]

Moreover, Le Brun's lecture shaped the theory of expression for much of the eighteenth century, for at this time the temperaments were barely discussed in relation to expression in painting. Diderot briefly mentions the temperaments in his *Essais sur la peinture* but it is only as late as the 1780s that one can speak of a real reawakening of interest in the temperaments. This coincided with the spread of Lavater's physiognomy and his own interest in character and temperament. The entry 'Physionomie' in the 'Beaux arts' section of Watelet's *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1788), looks back to Félibien's

descriptions of the temperaments and humoral symbolism in the work of Poussin.

A central message of Le Brun's lecture is that the passions cannot be observed in external nature: it is as if they were already inscribed in the mind of the artist. Le Brun reinforces Félibien's conception of the passions of the soul as part of the artist's *idea*, 'étant une partie qui bien que dépendante du dessin, doit être toute entière dans l'idée du peintre, puisqu'elle ne se peut bien copier sur le naturel' (I, 94). He suggests that what is lacking in the young artist is the technique for rendering them on paper. The simplicity of the drawings and their easily reproducible nature either as novices' sketches or as engravings makes them perfect didactic models. Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century, the lecture had, for many, assumed the status of a 'common drawing book [...] for the use of learners', as Hogarth puts it.[43] Paradoxically, therefore, the drawings work on both a practical and an ideal level.

Le Brun daringly pulls off a coup: within the aesthetic ideals of his time, he succeeds in composing the definitive treatise on expression. He creates pure mind in bodily form; he materialises the ideal model of the face. Only an artist of the highest quality can achieve this. The trainee artist is forced to comply, for only through copying Le Brun's models can pure mind be recreated. Thus, the drawings are a perfect endorsement of the command to copy from existing models rather than copying from nature. It is impossible to escape from their pull except by changing the criteria for the depiction of the passions, by moving over to an observational model.

Le Brun's schema is an all-encompassing one. It does not allow for individual artistic interpretation: instead it proposes a common language to be adopted by all artists. It might seem difficult to reconcile this interpretation of Le Brun as definitive with the charge of incompleteness which was levelled at Le Brun's schema by his eighteenth-century successors. In contrast, modern semiotic interpretations tend to see Le Brun as a closed system, a complete facial grammar or a perfectly formed alphabet.[44]

The solution to this dichotomy seems to be to understand Le Brun less in terms of completeness than in terms of finiteness. His system is dependent on a small number of bold and plainly recognisable symbols. It is here that the principle of decorum is paramount, for Le Brun depicts the passions in their most characteristic and unmistakable form. Purged of peripheral detail, each passion is unique, plainly identifiable and distinct from the other passions.[45] This implies that the schema cannot be adapted and enlarged at will because its workability depends on there being a limited number of passions. In contrast, the promotion of nuance into eighteenth-century aesthetics carried with it the problem of blurred messages which presaged the collapse of decorum.[46] Yet Le Brun continued to be influential precisely because of his boldly emblazoned

symbols: against a backdrop of nuance, variety and speed, he provided a fixed point of reference.

LE BRUN PERPETUATED: THE RELEVANCE TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THEORY AND PRACTICE

If Le Brun is often cast as the demon of Academic dogmatism, then Roger de Piles plays the saviour of French aesthetics.[47] It is seldom acknowledged that the two theorists were operating within very different spheres and that their views were largely governed by their respective positions. Le Brun was a teacher and an administrator, charged with the smooth running and the effective training of the Académie and therefore governed by pragmatism. De Piles had the luxury of a mobile position both outside and inside the Académie. He wrote as a connoisseur rather than a practising artist, and thus enjoyed the freedom to criticise without necessarily offering practical solutions. In the circumstances, it is perhaps inevitable that Le Brun should produce a work drastically reducing the passions to simple, easily reproducible precepts and that de Piles should reject it as oversimplified.

Even in his most didactic work, the *Cours de peinture par principes* (1708), de Piles openly opposes Le Brun's attempt to categorise and systematise the passions for painters. Nevertheless, he takes on board several of the assertions and assumptions of Le Brun's lecture. Thus, de Piles's writing, ostensibly hostile, reveals the imprint of Le Brun's teaching and the extent to which his precepts have been absorbed and accepted. His discussion of expression in this particular work must be read as a response to Le Brun which points the way for developments in expression later in the century.

De Piles defines expression in very similar terms to Le Brun as: 'Un terme général qui signifie la représentation d'un objet selon le caractère de sa nature, et selon le tour que le Peintre a dessein de lui donner pour la convenance de son ouvrage'.[48] The word 'convenance' here is a reminder of the link with decorum, of the idea that an object or figure must be represented in its most typical state. De Piles comments that expression and passion are often confused with one another, and this is a strong suggestion that Le Brun's lecture, with its emphasis on *expression particulière* at the expense of all other forms of expression has already shaped people's understanding, for de Piles sees the two as distinct. For him, passion is 'Un mouvement du corps accompagné de certains traits sur le visage qui marquent une agitation de l'âme' (p. 91), and he concludes that all passions are expressions but not the converse.

De Piles goes on to discuss the representation of the passions in detail:

> Ce serait ici le lieu de parler des passions de l'âme, mais j'ai trouvé qu'il était impossible d'en donner des démonstrations particulières qui puissent être d'une grande utilité à l'art. Il

m'a semblé, au contraire, que si elles étaient fixées par de certains traits qui obligeassent les Peintres à les suivre nécessairement comme des règles essentielles, ce serait ôter à la Peinture cette excellente variété d'expression qui n'a point d'autre principe que la diversité des imaginations, dont le nombre est infini et les productions aussi nouvelles que les pensées des hommes sont différentes. Une même passion peut être exprimée de plusieurs façons toutes belles et qui feront plus ou moins de plaisir à voir, selon le plus ou le moins d'esprit des Peintres qui les ont exprimées et des spectateurs qui les sentent (p. 92).

It is clear from the first sentence that a space has now been created within artistic discourse for discussion of expression. Though he does not mention Le Brun by name at this point, he is obviously criticising the academician's attempt to reduce the passions to a set of universally applicable signs. In his view, Le Brun's code serves merely to restrict the artist's imagination.

De Piles introduces a dimension which is alien to Le Brun, namely diversity. Since Alberti, diversity had commonly been hailed as desirable in a work of art, but here de Piles refers not to the diversity of an infinite nature, but to the varied potential of the creative mind. The artist has a role in the communication of the passions: they cannot be restricted to a set of templates but involve a complex and intangible process of mediation between artist and beholder. He repeats Horace's assertion that the artist must feel the passions he or she is to represent and calls upon the artist to make use of a mirror to observe the effects of his own passions, a well established rhetorical device. De Piles also acknowledges the role of the beholder, something which Le Brun's schema does not account for. The effect on the beholder is a sensual one, calculated to give the greatest amount of pleasure. In this respect, de Piles's ideas prefigure the Abbé Du Bos's location of passion in the beholder rather than on the canvas in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719).

In all this, de Piles's view of expression seems radically different from that of Le Brun. Yet his rejection is not entire: Le Brun serves as a starting point for the artist: 'Pour les démonstrations que Le Brun en a données, elles sont très savantes et très belles, mais elles sont générales' (pp. 93-4). He claims it is important for the artist to develop an individual repertoire from the study of nature and antiquity. But de Piles takes on board another implicit aspect of Le Brun's teaching, the focus solely on the face:

Le Brun a fait un traité des passions dont il a tiré la plupart des définitions de ce qu'en a écrit Descartes. Mais tout ce qu'en a dit ce philosophe ne regarde que les mouvements du coeur, et les Peintres n'ont besoin que de ce qui paraît sur le visage [...] La tête est donc la partie du corps qui contribue toute seule plus que toutes les autres ensemble à l'expression des passions. Les autres parties séparément ne peuvent exprimer que de certaines passions; mais la tête les exprime toutes (pp. 92-4).

De Piles also reinvents the terms *expression générale* and *expression particulière*. Whereas Le Brun's lecture deals with *expression particulière* in

the conventional sense, namely the bodily manifestation of the passions, de Piles labels Le Brun's descriptions 'générales' because they refer to a generalised conception of the human face and the passions. This is useful to the artist but is a mere starting point: 'Les expressions générales sont donc excellentes, parce que c'est d'elles que sortent les expressions particulières, comme les branches de l'arbre sortent de leur tronc' (p. 94). This points the theory of expression in a new direction, introducing the idea of the infinite variety of the passions. Yet, in many respects, it works as an endorsement of Le Brun because the domain of expression has now shifted to being exclusively around the human face and head, and discussion of the general and the particular occurs within this narrowed circumference. De Piles therefore accepts Le Brun in terms of his use as a general teaching model and in his focus on the face, both of which are carried through into theory and practice later in the century.

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The extent to which eighteenth-century theories of expression were dominated by the head is clear from a number of texts. In his *Traité de peinture* (1765), Michel-François Dandré-Bardon, who had an important role in the Prix Caylus, the Académie's prize for an expressive head (see chapter 5), immediately focuses on the head and the face in his definition of expression:

> Par la vérité des formes qui rend ce que nous appelons le corps de l'Expression, nous entendons le bel ensemble de la tête & la variété des traits dans les parties de détail. Le bel ensemble dépend de la rondeur de la tête, de la régularité de l'ovale & de la juste distribution des parties de la face (I, 57-8).

The rest of his discussion deals exclusively with facial expression. This head-centredness is also implicit in Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture* (1766). Facial expression predominates in his chapter on expression. As he conjures up the image of the Classical statue Antinous, he states: 'Je laisse là le reste de la figure, et je vais m'occuper seulement de la tête'.[49] Diderot's selection of only the head of Antinous has a further significance, for the Emperor Hadrian deified his drowned favourite by commissioning many statues which combined the ideal body of Apollo, Hermes or Dionysus and a portrait head (Plate 5a). Thus, the head had a psychological significance separate from the body and established a new ideal of beauty.[50] The theorist Laugier also singles out the face as particularly expressive:

> La partie où le peintre doit montrer plus d'exactitude & de correction, c'est le visage, parce que c'est là où l'ame se peint plus sensiblement & que la nature en a fait le miroir des passions. Quoique toute attitude du corps doive concourir à l'expression des sentimens, il est pourtant vrai que le triomphe de cette expression est dans l'arrangement des traits du visage.[51]

Le Brun's heads were also influential in artistic training. As copying formed an integral part of the Académie's official training programme, the young student required lots of models. This is evident from Lairesse's recommendation that the apprentice keep a stock of drawings with 'des modèles pour toutes les passions'.[52] The apprentice usually began by drawing shapes and then individual bodily parts, eyes, ears, noses as well as hands and feet. The drawing of the head marked the culmination of this initial stage in the learning process as it involved the combination of the various facial parts to form a coherent whole. It was only after this that the student earned the privilege of proceeding to the life class, and drawing the full length body or *académie.* Abraham Bosse's *Recueil de figures pour apprendre à dessiner sans maître*, a widely used drawing manual reprinted by Jombert in 1737, shows this progression visually with plates of individual noses, mouths and ears, both as simple line drawings and with shading. Jombert claims that his own manual, *Méthode pour apprendre le dessein, ou l'on donne les Regles générales de ce grand Art, et des Préceptes pour en acquérir la connoissance, et s'y perfectionner en peu de tems* (1755) is even better organised than Bosse's work, with its plates leading the artist in a logical sequence from individual features to whole faces and bodies (Plate 14b). The work contains a great many heads, proportionately more than in Bosse, and these are chiefly after Raphael, but also after Rubens and Slodtz (Plate 5b).

Heads from Raphael's paintings were used to make drawing books just as frequently as those of Le Brun.[53] Usually the same heads were reproduced over and over again, the most common sources being the angel's head from *Heliodorus*, and heads from the *Dispute of the Holy Sacrament*, *Parnassus* and *The Transfiguration.* Charles-Nicolas Cochin saw the copying of Raphael's heads as essential to the artist's training. In his *Lettres à un jeune artiste peintre*, he instructs the young artist on exactly which heads to copy when in Rome: the angels of Heliodorus are worthwhile whereas Heliodorus himself is a bad model; other heads from the *Dispute of the Holy Sacrament* or the *School of Athens* should be copied, but the woman in profile from the *Fire at the Borgo* is of limited value.[54]

The extent to which Raphael was seen primarily in terms of his heads is revealed in Dézallier d'Argenville's biography of the artist. He describes Raphael's method of working:

> Avec un esprit excellent, Raphaël étudioit sans cesse & travailloit à se perfectionner. S'il peignoit une Divinité, il tâchoit de transmettre dans sa tête, une partie du feu céleste qui devoit l'animer; une tête de guerrier montroit une ardeur invincible; les graces se rassembloient dans une tête de Vénus ou de Roxane; au contraire, dans celle d'une Vierge, la beauté simple se joignoit au receuillement le plus parfait. Ses têtes de consuls, de tyrans sont terribles; mais ses martyrs inspirent la sainteté même.[55]

Raphael became synonymous with heads in the eighteenth century, just as Le Brun did. Whilst they were both conceived as models for expression, and often used interchangeably for the artist's training, Raphael represented a different type of expression, softer, less rhetorical, less diagrammatic, and his faces moved by their quiet beauty rather than by their demonstrative passions. In the eighteenth century, Raphael's heads, together with those of Le Sueur, were contrasted with Le Brun's heads.

As well as drawing books, a repertoire of paintings regarded as particularly expressive evolved over the course of the eighteenth century, and artists were instructed to copy heads from all of them. Besides the works by Raphael in the Vatican, nearer to hand were Le Brun's battle scenes at Versailles, Le Sueur's *St Bruno* cycle, and Rubens's *Marie de Medici* cycle in the Luxembourg Palace. Rubens's cycle became important, not just for its accessibility, but also in the aftermath of the 'querelle des Rubénistes et des Poussinistes', when colour became properly associated with the expression of the passions and worked in conjunction with line. The somewhat paradoxical assimilation of Rubens into the 'Le Brunian' expressive tradition is evident in the work of Antoine Coypel, which combines Le Brunian traits and Rubensian colour. One picture from Rubens's Medici cycle frequently struck the imagination of commentators for its expressive qualities: this was *L'Accouchement de la reine*, where the Queen has just given birth to Louis XIII (Plate 6a). Du Bos observes that one can see on her face a mixture of joy and physical pain.[56] Some years later, Dandré-Bardon interprets the image somewhat differently, seeing a contrast between the queen's body which expresses the pain and exhaustion of childbirth, and her face which transcends this physical state:

> Le corps de Marie de Medicis est disposé dans un abattement qui caractérise les restes de sa douleur: mais sa tête se trouve dans une situation plus tranquille & tout à fait intéressante. La joie de voir le Prince qu'elle vient de mettre au monde éclate dans toute sa vivacité. On voit dans ses yeux que son ame se porte naturellement à cette douce satisfaction tandis que son corps encore sensible aux douloureuses impressions de l'enfantement est accablé de langueur (II, 257).

Dandré-Bardon then describes how effectively colour is used to enhance the arrangement of body and face. The Queen's colour is heightened but this does not detract from her dignity.

Le Brun must therefore be seen as largely responsible for the emphasis on the head and the face in eighteenth-century expressive theory and practice. The process was not an explicit one; it is more a case of gradual influence. Le Brun remained such a crucial factor in the minds of artists and theorists that inevitably many of his assertions were adopted, even if they were sometimes at

variance with the tenets of contemporary theory. The face and head were no longer seen in terms of pure spirit, of Cartesian severance. Rather, the face was seen as the most expressive part of the body, the summation of the passions. There was a strong parallel between theories in art and the man-centred, face-centred physiognomical ideas of Bougeant and Buffon. New ideas of human interaction were discussed, with the face being observed in close-up and, moreover, the role of the artist and the spectator became crucial in the mediation of the passions. And, with the Prix Caylus, there was a new relationship between artist and subject, a new problem of the live model.

NOTES

1. Norman Bryson describes the exhaustion of Le Brun's faces, once they have yielded their discursive content: *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chapter 1, 'The Legible Body'. See also: Louis Marin, 'Grammaire royale du visage', in *A Visage découvert*, exhibition catalogue, Fondation Cartier (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), pp. 70-89. Massin, *La Lettre et l'image* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), reveals the long historical association between the human body and forms of writing, letters and alphabets.
2. *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's 'Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière'*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994). This is a reworking of her much earlier doctoral thesis, 'Charles Le Brun's "Conference sur l'expression générale et particulière"' (University of London, 1960).
3. Three very different editions of Le Brun form the basis of most subsequent re-editions. These are the editions of Le Clerc, Picart and Audran, named after the engravers: Sébastien Le Clerc, *Caracteres des passions gravés sur les desseins de l'illustre Mons.r Le Brun* (Paris, n.d.; Jombert suggests 1696); Bernard Picart, *Conference de Monsieur Le Brun premier peintre du roy de France, chancelier et directeur de l'Academie de peinture et de sculpture. Sur l'expression generale & particuliere. Enrichie de figures gravées par B. Picart* (Amsterdam, 1698); Jean Audran, *Expressions des passions de l'ame. Representées en plusieurs testes gravées d'apres les desseins de feu Monsieur Le Brun Premier Peintre du Roy* (Paris, 1727).
4. Montagu, pp. 109-11. It is likely that the tiny drawings were enlarged using a pantograph or a similar device.
5. See Rennslaer Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: the Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 27.
6. Montagu (chapter 2) emphasises Le Brun's 'Complete Theory of Expression', bringing the lecture into line with Le Brun's lecture on animal physiognomies and his comments on the modes in his other lectures, in conjunction with Poussin's theory and practice. In this she seems to be influenced by Nivelon and Testelin's interpretations of Le Brun's motives. Both had an interest in reinforcing the coherence of Le Brun, the former as an admiring pupil and the latter as the Secretary of the Academy, drawing up a statement on expression in Academic teaching. Claude Nivelon, 'Vie de Charles Le Brun', Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, MS 12987; Henri Testelin, *Sentimens des plus habiles peintres du temps, sur la pratique de la peinture. Recueillis et mis en tables de preceptes* (Paris, 1680).
7. René Démoris has suggested that Le Brun's is not the only voice on expression in seventeenth-century France, but that he represents an extreme. This is true to the extent that other theorists such as Félibien and Roger de Piles steadfastly resist the idea that the passions can be codified into a universal set of principles. But I shall argue that their views were not fully appreciated until many years afterwards. 'Les Passions en peinture au XVIIIème siècle', in *Le Siècle de Voltaire*, ed. by Christiane Mervaud and Sylvain Menant (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1987), pp. 381-92, (p. 383).
8. See Erwin Panofsky's seminal study of the Platonic 'Idea' and the Neo-Platonic tradition in Western art: *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).
9. *The Analysis of Beauty*, ed. by J. Burke (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), p. 126.
10. Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura, e architettura* (Milan, 1585).

11. No transcript of the lecture has survived. Scholars are dependent on the account of Nivelon which is anecdotal, incomplete and frequently inaccurate; however, much information has been pieced together by Montagu (pp. 19-30).
12. Nivelon relates that Louis XIV was particularly impressed by Le Brun's work on both physiognomy and expression.
13. Montagu (p. 9) sees Le Brun's two lectures as working in conjunction, forming a perfect 'triptych' together with Le Brun's comments on the modes in his other lectures. Yves Hersant, 'Physionomies' in *A Visage découvert* (see note 1, above), pp. 90-101 (p. 96), conceives of them as radically separate, locating the two *Conférénces* within different Foucauldian epistemes so that physiognomy belongs to the sixteenth century and expression to the Classical Age. The true position seems to be somewhere in the middle: the episteme is far too monolithic to be effective here, taking no account of vogues and flurries of interest.
14. *Discours prononcez dans les conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Paris, 1721), pp. 147-51.
15. Morel D'Arleux, *Dissertation sur un traité de Charles Le Brun concernant les rapports de la physionomie humaine avec celle des animaux*, (Paris, 1806).
16. *Ars poetica*, with a translation by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1926), p. 458.
17. See Mosche Barasch, 'Der Ausdruck in der italienischen Kunsttheorie der Renaissance', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 12 (1967), 33-69; 'Character and Physiognomy: Bocchi on Donatello's St. George. A Renaissance Text on Expression in Art', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), 413-30.
18. Italian theory frequently provided models for seventeenth-century French theorists. See André Fontaine, *Les Doctrines de l'art en France* (Paris: Renouard, 1909), pp. 17-23.
19. See Testelin's 'Tables de préceptes' at the end of his *Sentimens*. Roger de Piles's 'Balance des peintres' in his *Cours de peinture par principes* (1708) determines painters' merits according to composition, expression, *disegno*, and colour.
20. *L'Idée de la perfection de la peinture* (Le Mans, 1662), pp. 13-14.
21. The most recent studies are Paul Duro, *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Nathalie Heinich, *Du Peintre à l'artiste* (Paris: Minuit, 1993).
22. The best study on the origin and history of academies is still Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).
23. Montagu's transcript, p. 112.
24. *Correspondance de Nicolas Poussin*, ed. by Charles Jouanny (Paris: J. Schmit, 1911), no. 156, pp. 372-74.
25. On the role of expression in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century architecture, see the introduction by Robin Middleton to Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or The Analogy of that Art with our Sensations*, trans. by David Britt (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1992).
26. See Montagu, pp. 9-14.
27. Montagu's transcript, p. 112.
28. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (*Della Pittura*), trans. by Cecil Grayson, ed. by Martin Kemp (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 74-76.
29. See Claire Pace, *Félibien's Life of Poussin* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1981), p. 52.
30. *Entretiens sur les vies et sur les ouvrages des plus excellens peintres anciens et modernes* (Trévoux, 1725; repr. Farnborough, Hants: Gregg Press, 1967), VIII, 91. The *Entretiens* were first published from 1666-88.
31. It is interesting to juxtapose these views of Poussin's expressiveness with more modern interpretations of his work: Anthony Blunt's emphasis on the stoic element in Poussin, where the passions were restrained rather than demonstrated, an approach which dominated Poussin scholarship for many years, would seem to conflict with the accounts of his contemporaries and immediate successors: *Nicolas Poussin*, 2 vols (London: Phaidon, 1958), especially chapter 4: 'Poussin and Stoicism'.
32. See note 19, above. On the importance of Raphael in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see the exhibition catalogue *Raphael et l'art francais* (Paris: Galéries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1983- 84).
33. Barasch, 'Der Ausdruck in der italienischen Kunsttheorie der Renaissance' (p. 41), points out that Book II of Alberti's *Della Pittura* which deals with bodily expression is much more typical of the period than his discussion of facial expression.
34. See Bernard Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles et les débats sur le coloris au siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1957).

35. Hubert Damisch, 'L'Alphabet des masques', *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse*, 21 (1980), 93-131.
36. *Sentimens*, p. 25.
37. Montagu (p. 17) refutes the claim that Le Brun borrows heavily from Cureau, suggesting that the latter's influence is slight.
38. Stephanie Ross defines the lecture as speculative physiology, in keeping with the theoretical science of his day: 'Painting the Passions: Charles Le Brun's "Conférence sur l'expression"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (1984), 25-47.
39. This idea is explored by Derrida who observes the non-naturalistic depiction of the figure *Le Pleurer* which does not produce tears: *Mémoires d'aveugle: L'Autoportrait et autres ruines* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990), p. 129.
40. Montagu (pp. 101-02) objects that Parsons does little to improve Le Brun's formulations and criticises his illustrations as 'wooden'. Whilst her argument backs up the point that Parsons's approach is not an 'improvement' on Le Brun, Montagu's desire to see Parsons as a pale imitation of Le Brun conceals the striking fact that, whereas their conclusions are similar, their starting points and methods of approach are vastly different.
41. Montagu's transcript, p. 124.
42. *Sentimens*, p. 24.
43. *Analysis of Beauty*, p. 127.
44. Louis Marin, ('Grammaire royale du visage'), compares Le Brun with the Port Royal grammar; Damisch (p. 125) is quite inaccurate in saying that there are twenty four heads. The Louvre drawings number more than sixty; Leclerc's edition has 19 sets of three heads, Picart's has 54 and Audran's has 19. He probably has in mind Jombert's anecdote that he saw 'Chez Paignon-Dijonval deux feuilles de dessins à l'encre de Chine par Leclerc, au simple trait "representant vingt-quatre profils differens de tetes d'expression pour les passions de l'ame d'apres les tableaux de Le Brun"'. Quoted in Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes, *Inventaire du fonds français: Graveurs du XVIIème siècle*, ed. by Maxime Préaud, 10 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1980), VIII, 306.
45. Linda Walsh has rightly drawn attention to Le Brun's emphasis on 'containment' of passion which is linked with the notion of decorum. Yet she explores this in terms of Le Brun's restraint of the passions which she contrasts with their apparently freer manifestation in the eighteenth century. Actually 'containment' is more appropriate in the context of signification: the intrinsic meaning of an object is most effectively conveyed if it is not 'out of character'. 'The Expressive Face: Manifestations of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century French Art', *Art History*, 19 (1996), 523-50.
46. Montagu's suggestion (p. 18) that Le Brun's theory is 'infinitely expandable' appears to be similar to the views of eighteenth-century theorists who wished to add more passions in order to complete his schema. But although in theory the simple passions may be combined in many different ways to form mixed ones, the system functions semiotically only because the passions are sufficiently distinguishable from one another to preclude confusion.
47. The bias could not be more apparent in Lee's *Ut Pictura Poesis* (pp. 27-30). Here the 'arid formalism' and 'Draconian code of the French Academy', along with Le Brun's 'chilling formulas for expression' are opposed to the champion de Piles who comments 'daringly', 'sensibly' and 'with indubitable correctness'. Moreover, 'the modern reader will scarcely fail to agree with the opinion of de Piles, for nowhere did the aesthetic legislation of the Academy display itself in such absurdly detailed and absurdly abstract categories as in this attempt to specify the minute changes in facial expression'.
48. *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 91.
49. *Essais sur la peinture*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1988), p. 697.
50. See Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (London: John Murray, 1956), p. 44.
51. Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Manière de bien juger les ouvrages de la peinture* (Paris, 1771), p. 138.
52. Gérard de Lairesse, *Le Grand livre des peintres, ou l'Art de la peinture considéré dans toutes ses parties, et démontré par principes*, 2 vols (Paris, 1787), I, 136. This was originally published as *Het groot schilderboek* (Amsterdam, 1707).
53. Mlle. Le Hay [Elisabeth Chéron], *Livre à dessiner, composé de testes tirées des plus beaux ouvrages de Raphael* (Paris, 1706); Nicolas Dorigny, *Recueil de XC têtes tirées des sept cartons des actes des apôtres peints par Raph' Urbin qui se conservent dans le palais d'Hampton Court* (Paris, 1722); Benjamin Ralph, *The School of Raphael, or the Student's Guide to expression in historical paintings* [...] *with* [...] *the Passions as characterised by Raphael in the Cartoons* (London, 1759); Paul Fidanza, *Recueil de têtes choisies de personnages illustres dans les lettres et dans les armes* [...] *d'après les peintures de Raphael*

d'Urbin (Paris, 1785). Raphael's heads are also included in Jombert's *Méthode pour apprendre le dessin* (Paris, 1755) and in the plates for the article 'Dessin' in the *Encyclopédie*.

54. n.d. Probably c.1774.
55. *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, 4 vols (Paris, 1762 [first published 1745-52]), I, 9.
56. *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1967[facsimile of 1770 edition]), p. 61.

CHAPTER 3

THEORIES OF EXPRESSION IN MID-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

Expression in mid-eighteenth century France, as in Le Brun's day, was considered to be the source of life, movement and eloquence, the very soul of painting and the ultimate intellectual and spiritual challenge to the artist. It was seen in the last chapter how Le Brun shaped the terms of discussion on expression for succeeding generations of artists, and how they derived in particular from his work a focus on the head and face, and a functional system of specifically labelled and instantly recognisable passions. Yet despite Le Brun's hegemony over artistic theory and practice, a very different aesthetic took shape in mid-eighteenth century France.[1] The present chapter outlines this new aesthetic, highlighting its tensions and complexities. I show that part of this arose directly out of Le Brunian theories and formed a dialectic, both approaching and deviating from him. In turn, what was constituted as 'Le Brunian' became further refined, not to say restricted, and formed a point of opposition to the prevailing theories. Yet other aspects of this new aesthetic differed sharply from Le Brunian co-ordinates.

The theory of expression in mid-eighteenth century France was governed by a new epistemology. With the progress of empirical thought patterns, there came a sharpened awareness of the variety of nature, of a nature characterised by flux and movement. And with this empirical approach, the passions came to be conceived very differently — in terms of their type, number, strength and speed — leading to new developments in the artistic vocabulary of the emotions. Discussion also centred on how much of nature it was expedient to replicate, on how much detail and multiplicity could and should be rendered by the artist. Behind this lay the problem of signification: calls for variety had to be counterbalanced by an assurance of clarity, for the profusion of detail could lead to a dissolution of meaning. The question was also raised of how much it was possible to observe from nature. A number of commentators objected that the passions could not be observed in everyday life since the codes of modern (urban) society had suppressed or distorted 'natural' human behaviour.

Beyond a consideration of the passions and their representation, the present discussion considers other aspects of head-drawing in the mid-eighteenth century. Jacques Chouillet has identified the tension in art of the period as that between the conflicting demands of *idéalité* and *positivité*.[2] In other words, the artist had to reconcile a faithful rendering of the natural world with an inner Neo-Platonic ideal. To this one might add the claim that, by the

mid-eighteenth century, these two criteria had never been further apart. There was a great disparity between ideal and empirical approaches to painting: artists did not lose sight of their ideal, but paradoxically, it became equated with uniformity, with a limited number of perfect forms, and thus was increasingly difficult to reconcile with a conception of nature as infinitely varied.[3] Hence the artist's task became a near impossibility, involving painstaking observation and chasing after a nature which was constantly in motion, but also removing all of nature's contingencies in order to reach an abstract ideal. The human face was the crux of this dilemma since it was regarded as both the clearest manifestation of diversity in nature and also the mirror to the soul, to the abstract life of the subject. The argument that every human face is unique, which was commonplace in the moral literature of the time, coupled with the call for a more varied and naturalistic portrayal of the face, had to be reconciled with the ideal of beauty as a generalised abstraction.

One final aspect of the discussion on expression at this time which should not go unnoticed is its part in the reaction against the Rococo. Particularly after 1747, during the reforms of the Académie under Lenormant de Tournehem and Charles-Antoine Coypel, expression was vaunted because it endorsed the ideals of Poussin and the Italian Renaissance, and underpinned the goals of history painting.[4] In contrast, the Rococo was portrayed as the antithesis of this noble eloquence. Hence expression, which had been used by seventeenth-century artists in order to rank with poets rather than craftsmen, was given a different, but equally impelling political charge. Outside the Académie too, the Rococo was berated for its lack of expressive qualities, for its stiffness, its artifice and, most importantly, its lack of eloquence.[5] Diderot issues a warning in the chapter on expression of his *Essais sur la peinture*, implicitly rejecting the tricks of the Rococo: 'Ne confondez point les minauderies, la grimace, les petits coins de bouche relevés, les petits becs pincés, et mille autres puériles afféteries, avec la grâce, moins encore avec l'expression'.[6] The grimace, either an extreme or contorted facial expression, or a stiff, static and artificial one, was universally condemned.

This chapter analyses the discourse on expression around 1760 with reference to three key thinkers. The painter and theorist Claude-Henri Watelet, who was made an *Amateur Honoraire* of the Académie in 1766, wrote extensively on expression, producing a large number of articles on the visual arts for the *Encyclopédie* which form the basis of his *L'Art de peindre* (1760). The engraver and academician, Cochin, was a progressive thinker and his piece, *Mercure du mois de juin de l'année 2355* (1755) is one of his more unorthodox analyses of art. Even more challenging and suggestive is Diderot's discussion of expression in his *Essais sur la peinture* (1766). The work of

these three writers, though divergent in subject, tone and viewpoint, highlights common preoccupations.

WATELET'S PARADIGM

The section of the *Encyclopédie* article 'Passion' devoted to painting is the most comprehensive statement on expression since Le Brun. Drawn up by the Chevalier de Jaucourt, it is an amalgam of other texts on expression and an extraordinary synthesis of material. The text refers closely to Le Brun and paraphrases his description of *La Frayeur*; it also quotes the paragraphs from Buffon's 'Description de l'homme' in his *Histoire naturelle* where the physical effects of the different passions are described. This brings together what were clearly regarded as the two greatest existing authorities on the subject. In addition, it sets out the notes of Watelet which were subsequently written up in *L'Art de peindre.*

In the article, Le Brun's schema is viewed as incomplete, representing only a sparse selection of passions, a mere sketch of a total project. Jaucourt explains that Watelet proposes to 'fill in the gaps' between his passions:

> Pour donner aux peintres une idée de quelques-unes des *passions* principales, M. Watelet a cru pouvoir les ranger par nuances, en suivant l'ordre que leur indique le plus ordinairement la nature. M. Le Brun avoit déjà ébauché ce sujet; mais M. Watelet l'a enrichi de nouvelles réflexions, dont je vais orner cet article.[7]

The vocabulary of the passions is increased so that, for example, physical pain can encompass all of the following: 'La souffrance, la douleur, les élancemens, les déchiremens, les tourmens, les angoisses, le désespoir'. The rest of the article consists of lists of these passions, grouped under general headings. Behind Watelet's schema lies an observational, *a posteriori* approach to the passions which are sought out from a varied and ever-changing nature. His emphasis is on the physiological effects of these passions and he describes trembling, convulsions, tears and other bodily reactions. This could not be more different from Le Brun's incorporeal passions. The key to Watelet's schema is his word 'nuance'. It is now possible and indeed desirable to slide imperceptibly from one passion to the next. Movement is contained in both the progression between successive passions and in the ebb and flux of the individual passion.

Watelet's *Encyclopédie* article 'Expression' expands on the idea of multiplicity by outlining the artist's task in representing these many passions:

> Il y a donc dans tous les mouvemens du corps & de l'ame une double progression dépendante l'une de l'autre; et l'artiste observateur attaché à examiner ces différens rapports, pourra, dans les mouvemens du corps, suivre les impressions de l'ame. C'est-là l'étude que doit faire le peintre qui aspire à la partie de l'*expression*; son succès dépendra de la finesse de ses observations, & sur-tout de la justesse avec laquelle il mettra d'accord ces

deux mouvemens. Les passions ont des degrés comme les couleurs ont des nuances; elles naissent, s'accroissent, parviennent à la plus grande force qu'elles puissent avoir, diminuent & ensuite s'évanouissent.[8]

Here Watelet argues that bodily movements have an intimate 'rapport' with the movements of the soul. He does not explain the nature of these 'rapports' but suggests that the 'artiste observateur' will gain an understanding of them through painstaking observation. The relationship between body and passions is two-way, but the artist's means of access to the passions is from the outside, through the careful recording of bodily movement. In its emphasis on the physical rather than the metaphysical, Watelet's view is similar to Bougeant's. It is also the antithesis of the approach of Le Brun, after Descartes, who takes an abstract concept of a particular passion as a starting point and then anticipates its corporeal effect.

Just as in the article 'Passion', Watelet introduces the vocabulary of nuance and degree. The analogy with colour is important as it marks a departure from Le Brun's total emphasis on line. Because of the passions' rapid fluctuations in strength and type, the artist must be sensible to precise differentiations: 'S'il se trompe d'un degré son imitation sera moins parfaite; si son erreur est plus considérable, d'une contradiction plus sensible naîtra le défaut de vraisemblance qui détruit l'illusion' (VI, 319). The difficulty for the artist is one of capturing a moment which has exactly the right strength of passion before it disappears into a stronger or weaker version of that passion and is no longer 'vraisemblable'.

The result of this awareness of degrees and nuances is to suggest speed. The artist is faced with constantly changing passions which give the impression of rapid movement and the task of 'chasing after' these passions is an extremely exacting one. Though painting has always grappled with the problem of how to render movement within a static medium, the aesthetic of mid-eighteenth century France seems to have involved an increase in movement and speed. It is a case of degree: more passions were allowed into the repertoire and this led to greater speed and complexity. In contrast, Le Brun's drawings slow down the passions and give them an air of monumentality. One does not have the impression that they have been 'seized' from a constantly moving subject and are 'stills' from an infinity of possible other ones. It is this aspect of Le Brun's drawings which led to the frequent criticism in the eighteenth-century that they were mannered, that they lacked the fluidity which was seen as desirable. Of course, Le Brun was not unaware of the movements of the passions: the Le Clerc engravings depict several *mouvements violents* or *mouvements composés*, but it was the effect of his drawings rather than their underlying methodology which figured in the minds of eighteenth-century artists and theorists.

The interest in nuance and gradation at this time also shifted the emphasis of the representation of the passions from centrality to differentiation. Le Brun, in line with the principle of decorum, had defined expression as something intrinsic and essential, as that which 'marque les veritables caracteres de chaque chose', and in his drawings and descriptions charted what he saw as the most characteristic utterance of each passion. In contrast, the mid-eighteenth century was interested in shades, in the minute distinctions between the passions, and a passion was now defined in relation to other visibly similar passions. In a word, identification of the passions revolved around what a passion *was not* rather than what it *was*.

Watelet highlights the difficulty for the artist of capturing the precise degree of a particular passion and indicates that failure to do so can lead to a 'défaut de vraisemblance'. Here the issue is not just one of the artist's excellence: a more fundamental problem of signification is being posed. Underlying Watelet's comments is the suggestion that art cannot replicate exactly all the minute distinctions of nature because this would blur the visual message to be conveyed to the beholder. This would also suggest why Le Brun could not be abandoned in the mid-eighteenth century: his bold, plainly identifiable signs were recognised as vital to the signification process. Le Brun's and Watelet's schemas thus functioned in opposition to one another: type versus variety, clarity versus confusion.

Despite Watelet's insistence on an observational approach, he points to a difficulty facing the artist in the representation of the passions, namely modern life. In *L'Art de peindre*, he expands on the paradox that, the more a nation becomes civilised and hence distant from nature, the more it seeks to approach nature through its art. Expression, the peak of artistic perfection, is inaccessible to the artist who lives in such a polished society:

> Mais, encore une fois, comment faire des observations sur l'Expression des Passions, dans une Capitale, par exemple, où tous les hommes conviennent de paroître n'en ressentir aucune? Où trouver parmi nous aujourd'hui, non pas des hommes coleres, mais des hommes qui permettent à la colere de se peindre d'une façon absolument libre, dans leurs attitudes, dans leurs gestes, dans leurs mouvements, & dans leurs traits? Plus une société sera nombreuse et civilisée, plus la force et la variété de l'Expression doit s'affoiblir; parce que l'ordre & l'uniformité seront les principes d'où naîtra ce qu'on appelle l'harmonie de la société (pp. 131-32).

Leonardo da Vinci's dictum to go out onto the streets is put into practice with disastrous consequences: nature is not seen there, for the new urban life has suppressed the natural: variety has given way to uniformity, spontaneity to conformity. Though Watelet recognises that some element of control is vital to social cohesion, he also suggests that society is an instrument of repression where there is a constant disparity between outward signs and inner feelings. This in itself was not a new theme, for Cureau de la Chambre had written of

his own opaque society a century earlier; however, Watelet's view is strikingly different from that of Félibien who, it will be remembered, saw an essential compatibility between a passion and its external representation. Furthermore, Watelet contradicts Félibien in his suggestion that the nobility's claim to a more refined display of emotion is merely social affectation and far removed from nature. The implication of his argument is that the passions are felt in the same way by all people, regardless of rank.

What is significant about Watelet's discussion is that it signals the collapse of decorum in both social and aesthetic terms. Society is no longer what it seems, since the demarcations of rank are merely external. The link between inner and outer is no longer unquestioned and unquestionable, and this is why Watelet considers the perception of 'rapports' to be such a difficult process for the artist. Moreover, expression for Watelet no longer seems to be about the depiction of objects in their most characteristic form, as it had been for Le Brun, de Piles and others. Rather the passions have come to be associated with spontaneity, with the revelation of inner feeling: in short, expression has become self-expression.

Because he recognises that the passions are not properly visible in civilised society, Watelet chooses to categorise the outward signs of the passions in verbal form. It is this description which forms the bulk of the *Encyclopédie* article on the passions and is reproduced almost verbatim in *L'Art de peindre*. Strangely then, Watelet's aesthetic doubles back on itself. Whilst purporting to be observational, in fact it resorts to theoretical definitions, just as Le Brun's work had done.

What emerges from Watelet's work is a curious and fascinating dialectic. Watelet claims to be working in the spirit of Le Brun, but in reality his aesthetic posits something radically different: a new vocabulary of nuance, simultaneity and rapid movement, an observational, *a posteriori* approach, and the tricky task for the artist of seizing the passions from an ever-mobile nature. Yet his work also highlights the weaknesses of this observational approach because of a lack of suitable models, and because of potential loss of meaning which stems from the depiction of endless variety.

COCHIN AND FACIAL DIVERSITY

Cochin's satirical piece, *Mercure du mois de juin de l'année 2355*, published in the *Mercure de France* in 1755 and reprinted in his *Recueil de quelques pièces concernant les arts* (1757-81) juxtaposes a discussion of facial variety with a critique of some of the practices of head-drawing in the 1750s. It also grapples with the problem of reconciling empirical and ideal approaches to

artistic representation. The article gives a report of the findings of a certain Monsieur Truthlover, who ostensibly writes from a position six hundred years ahead and attempts to reconstruct the historical reality of the 1750s from the paintings which have been left to him. His belief, both naïve and sophisticated, that art exactly replicates historical and social conditions is clever for it achieves the opposite effect, highlighting the disparity between painting practices and reality, and showing up painting techniques as artificial. Cochin also takes a sideways look at his own aesthetic climate, particularly its imperative of the faithful imitation of nature.

Truthlover observes that the 'unnatural' quality of eighteenth-century painting is due not to poor artistic practice, but to the fact that nature must have been very different from that of his own age. He deduces that nature's colour has changed over time, which is clearly a dig by Cochin at garish or sugary Rococo shades. He also argues that faces used to be more ideal and more uniform than they are now, since they were 'unis et presque sans détails'.[9] In his day, perfect features and complexions have now given way to what he sees as defects:

> Tous les visages étoient encore agréables de forme & de couleur; au lieu que de notre temps la quantité de tons de couleur peu sensibles & si variés que nous voyons dans la chair, & qui nous donne tant de peine à imiter, est la preuve d'une nature flétrie. Dans ces anciens tableaux on voit à presque toutes les têtes, des nés aquilins, des physionomies nobles & des traits réguliers, même lorsqu'on a voulu représenter le plus bas peuple; ce qui y répand un air de fraternité, & les fait paroître en quelque façon de la même famille (I, 126).

This passage suggests that nature itself is in decline, passing from perfect general forms to a multiplicity of tones and shapes which are considered imperfect. On one level, the passage reads as praise for artists' representation of ideal forms: aquiline noses and regular features, and the terms 'air de fraternité' and 'la même famille' are positive qualifications. Even amongst the 'bas peuple' where one would expect to find an abundance of imperfection, features are abstracted into general forms, resulting in a small number of physically similar types. The irony is that Truthlover takes the ideal forms of painting for an empirical reality, believing that Paris really did contain a limited number of faces. The irony is heightened by the parallel with antiquity: Cochin echoes the widely-held belief of his contemporaries that the Greeks actually were a more physically perfect race, and that proof of this lies in the beauty of their sculpture.

But there is a sub-text to the argument, for Cochin draws attention to the disparity between the representation of ideal forms and reality, precisely the difficulty in reconciling 'idéalité' and 'positivité' which Chouillet has identified. Truthlover recognises that art is a much more tricky business in his own day than it was in the eighteenth century. He concludes about the facial

variety of his own age that 'Il en résulte à la vérité une richesse avantageuse à la peinture, par la variété que cela répand dans le tableau; mais en même temps l'Art en est devenu plus difficile' (I, 127). In the past, he says, 'Il pouvoit suffire à un Peintre de ces temps-là d'avoir appris à dessiner une douzaine de têtes: elles lui servoient à tout, & il n'avoit plus qu'à travailler de mémoire; au lieu que maintenant nous ne pouvons rien produire qui soit approuvé, que nous n'ayons continuellement la nature devant les yeux' (I, 128). This is clearly a reference by Cochin to current drawing practices, where artists, trained to copy heads such as those of Le Brun from pattern books rather than from life, reproduced a limited set of formulae. Cochin manages to suggest that such practices were insufficient in a new climate where the variety of nature was all-pervasive.

Cochin's argument then turns slightly, for instead of natural causes he posits a sociological factor for the increase in facial difference, namely the coming together of people from different races for the purposes of trade:

> La ville de Paris étoit alors fort petite; elle ne pouvoit contenir au plus qu'environ un million d'habitans. Si peu de monde dans un petit espace donne lieu de croire que les habitans se connoissoient tous, la grande habitude de se voir faisoit que tous leurs enfans se ressembloient, & cette conformité continuoit dans l'âge d'homme fait. D'ailleurs, tous les habitans étoient naturels du pays; ce qui augmentoit encore l'uniformité des caracteres: au lieu que maintenant Paris est presque aussi peuplé d'étrangers de tous les pays de l'Univers, que la grandeur de son commerce & sa puissance y attirent, que de ses habitans naturels. Delà une race mêlée & une infinité de caracteres de visages différens (I, 127-28).

According to Truthlover, Paris in the eighteenth century must have been much smaller, and social interaction amongst a homogeneous population actually enhanced its distinct racial characteristics. In contrast, Truthlover claims that the Paris of his own day is marked by the recent influx of strangers and foreigners and that daily commerce with them gradually shapes people's faces in different ways, thereby eroding the distinctiveness of facial types. Moreover, he observes that, with time, these newcomers will marry amongst the indigenous population and procreate, which will result in a further loss of cultural specificity. To an eighteenth-century reader, for whom Paris was the second largest city in the Western world and had a reputation as a major trading centre, Truthlover's findings would have sounded particularly absurd. In his explanation of facial difference, Cochin draws on contemporary theories of *climat* which were expounded by writers such as Du Bos and Montesquieu.[10] These theories considered human beings to be physiologically adapted to their physical and social surroundings, which in turn accounts for ethnic difference.

By portraying cosmopolitanism in negative terms, Cochin subscribes to the theme of the decadence of modern urban life which was discussed in rather different terms by Watelet. Cochin suggests that, whereas the conformity of

faces within a distinct cultural group creates a strong sense of identity which is reflected in bold and distinct facial features, cosmopolitanism causes a loss of this group identity, leaving a heterogeneous mass of unique but somehow weakened physical traits. As in life, so in art, for Cochin is plainly aware of the need to impose some kind of limit on the vagaries of nature in representation because of the likely breakdown in signification. In other words, the artist cannot reproduce endless variety because this results in a weakening of painterly messages to the beholder. Cochin thus brings us back to the vexed issue of type versus variety, clarity versus confusion.

DIDEROT ON EXPRESSION

Diderot's chapter on expression in his *Essais sur la peinture* is one of the most compact and crucial utterances on facial expression in the mid-eighteenth century. It is important both as a statement of its time and also as a more universal appraisal. Certainly, by the early nineteenth century, the text was considered by French experts on physiognomy to be an authoritative utterance and, despite huge differences in the two thinkers' outlooks and methods, it was assimilated with Lavater's work.[11] Diderot offers a highly personal view of expression, expanding the boundaries of the conventional art treatise which had been formalised by Fréart de Chambray a century previously. Whilst seriously engaging with many aspects of current artistic practice, he also subverts this formal space, treating it as an occasion for the free play of his ideas. His chapter headings reveal a quirky sense of humour, such as: 'Mes pensées bizarres sur le dessin' and 'Mes petites idées sur la couleur'. Moreover, Diderot's thinking on expression cannot be contained within the formal space allocated to it and some of his ideas crop up as important digressions in other chapters.

Diderot states near the beginning, 'Un peintre qui n'est pas physionomiste est un pauvre peintre' and, in so doing, he boldly reinserts the term physiognomy into art discourse. It was seen in Chapter 1 that *physiognomy* carried with it negative connotations of superstition and divination, linked to a discarded Renaissance cosmology. After Antoine Coypel's lengthy discussion of physiognomy and expression which was heavily influenced by Le Brun in his lectures to the Académie around 1720, the word 'physiognomy' practically disappeared from writing on art and the subject was subsumed under the label 'expression'. If physiognomy was referred to, it was often acccompanied by a caveat, as was the case with Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*. Art dictionaries of the time such as Antoine Pernety's *Dictionnaire portatif de peinture, sculpture et gravure* (1757) have no entry for physiognomy. In the case of Pernety this is doubly striking, given his early exposure to physiognomy through his uncle and his subsequent interest in the subject. Likewise the *Encyclopédie* does not

overtly connect physiognomy with the visual arts. Yet Diderot appears to reverse this trend, so that later works on art such as Watelet's *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1788) include a long section on the subject. Perhaps this conflation of the two terms is also explained by Diderot's merging of two themes: physiognomy in everyday life, and physiognomy as an issue in representation.

The imprint of Le Brun is apparent in the early stages of the chapter. Diderot is known to have borrowed a copy of either the Picart or the Audran edition of Le Brun's lecture from the Bibliothèque du Roi in January 1748 and would have been familiar with both drawings and text through their incorporation into the *Encyclopédie* article 'Dessin'.[12] The chapter's first sentence reads like an echo of Le Brun: 'L'expression est en général l'image d'un sentiment' (p. 696). This recalls Le Brun's open definition at the start of his lecture which encompasses *expression générale*. Yet like Le Brun, Diderot soon afterwards homes in on the face: 'Sur son visage! Que dis-je? sur sa bouche, sur ses joues, dans ses yeux, en chaque partie de son visage. L'oeil s'allume, s'éteint, languit, s'égare, se fixe; et une grande imagination de peintre est un recueil immense de toutes ces expressions' (p. 697). The use of the word 'recueil' recalls artists' drawing manuals with their heads to be copied. Diderot subsequently discards the body of Antinous in order to focus solely on his head, picturing the minute variations to the corners of his mouth and his eyebrows which would disfigure his beautiful expression, suggesting irony, pride, cynicism and deceit (Plate 5a). His attention is on precisely those parts of the face which Le Brun indicates are crucial to expression.

Diderot goes on to describe the progress of an angry man: 'L'homme entre en colère, il est attentif, il est curieux, il aime, il hait, il méprise, il dédaigne, il admire; et chacun des mouvements de son âme vient se peindre sur son visage en caractères clairs, évidents, auxquels nous ne nous méprenons jamais' (p. 696). Diderot may well be thinking of Le Brun's *La Colère* (Plate 4b), and in fact the other passions, 'l'attention', 'l'amour', 'la haine', 'le mépris' and 'l'admiration' all form part of Le Brun's lexicon. But the effect of the passage is to bring a static Le Brunian image to life: the face is activated, the passions multiplied, and Diderot's syntax with its repeated 'il' contributes to this impression of speed and fluidity. The passions seem almost to run into one another, giving an impression of simultaneity. They are depicted actively as verbs, in contrast to Le Brun's immobile abstract nouns. Rather than being constrained within a typology of fixed and rigid expressions, Diderot's faces are constantly in motion. Occasionally they coincide with a Le Brunian type, but their real expressivity lies in their rapid transition, in the eloquence of movement. In this way, Diderot's description echoes the flexible multiplicity of Watelet's paradigm.

Diderot elaborates on the subject of the ebb and flow of successive passions in his chapter on composition:

> Chaque action a plusieurs instants; mais je le dis, et je le répète, l'artiste n'en a qu'un, dont la durée est celle d'un coup d'oeil. Cependant, comme sur un visage où régnait la douleur et où l'on a fait peindre la joie, je retrouverai la passion présente confondue parmi les vestiges de la passion qui passe (pp. 714-15).

Here he addresses the perennial artistic problem of how to render successivity in a single moment. The present passion points both forwards and backwards for it contains the traces of past passions, each one blending in to form a continuum. Diderot echoes Watelet in his incorporation of colour into expression which contrasts with Le Brun's emphasis on line. In the chapter on colour of the *Essais sur la peinture*, Diderot talks of each passion having a different hue:

> Est-ce que chaque passion n'a pas la sienne? Est-elle la même dans tous les instants d'une passion? La couleur a ses nuances dans la colère. Si elle enflamme le visage, les yeux sont ardents; si elle est extrême, et qu'elle serre le coeur au lieu de le détendre, les yeux s'égarent, la pâleur se répand sur le front et sur les joues, les lèvres deviennent tremblantes et blanchâtres. Une femme garde-t-elle le même teint dans l'attente du plaisir, dans les bras du plaisir, au sortir de ses bras? (pp. 680-81).

Again, 'la colère' is the focus, divided into many separate instants, nuanced according to its various physiological manifestations. In the chapter on expression, he also evokes the theory of the humours when he suggests that poets, artists and musicians normally have pale skins because they are 'bilieux'. He even suggests 'fondez dans ce blême une teinte jaunâtre, si vous voulez' (p. 708), which emphasises the yellow bile that predominates in this type. This subject was rare in art discourse of the time, and only fully reappeared in Watelet's *Encyclopédie méthodique*.

Critics have regularly pointed to Diderot's insistence on the clarity and extreme legibility of gesture and facial expression.[13] This would appear to be borne out by Diderot's description 'chacun des mouvements de son âme vient se peindre sur son visage en caractères clairs, évidents, auxquels nous ne nous méprenons jamais' (p. 696), and also by his assertion 'L'expression est faible ou fausse si elle laisse incertain sur le sentiment' (p. 698). This has led them to infer that Diderot subscribes to a typology of the passions along Le Brunian lines, a limited and invariable vocabulary of clearly recognisable signs.[14] Certainly Diderot explores the idea that there is a common currency of facial expressions, that certain shapes and movements are universally recognisable and understood. This is evident in his account of physiognomy in the *Encyclopédie* article 'Théosophes':

> Les passions ont chacune leur physionomie particulière. Les traits s'altèrent sur le visage à mesure qu'elles se succèdent dans l'âme. Le même homme présente donc à l'observateur attentif un grand nombre de masques divers. Ces masques des passions ont des traits

caractéristiques et communs dans tous les hommes. Ce sont les mêmes viscères intérieurs qui se meuvent dans la joie, dans l'indignation, dans la colère, dans la frayeur, dans le moment de la dissimulation, du mensonge, du ressentiment. Ce sont les mêmes muscles qui se détendent ou se resserrent à l'intérieur, les mêmes parties qui se contractent ou qui s'affaissent.[15]

Here the passions are manifold, yet each has a distinct character or 'physionomie'. Each passion is a mask which may be worn interchangeably by all human faces and recognised by the keen observer. To this extent, therefore, Diderot's passions are similar to Le Brun's templates. In the chapter on expression, Diderot pushes at the idea that somehow the vast majority of individuals manage to interpret these signs in the same way. In the case of the artist, Diderot suggests that a clear understanding of these unwritten universal 'rules' is vital, as is the ability to translate them into the universal signs of painting. It is in this sense that he insists that the painter must be a good 'physiognomist'. For example, Diderot points out that an oval face, broader at the top than at the bottom signifies maleness and nobility, whereas a round face suggests youth and is more appropriate for a woman or child. It is these features which will create a recognisable and lifelike form and will trigger the appropriate response in the beholder. Also, he suggests that certain categories of face are better at representing certain passions, thereby merging character and passion, fixed and moving parts: 'il y a des boudeuses charmantes, et des ris déplaisants' (p. 710).

It should be noted that in Diderot's writing there is a shift away from Le Brun's emphasis on the artist's creation and onto the beholder's intuitive response, a shift which owes much to Du Bos and De Piles. This is vividly demonstrated in the passage where he instructs the reader to experiment with Antinous's facial parts: 'Relevez seulement un des coins de la bouche, l'expression devient ironique, et le visage vous plaira moins' (p. 697). The fact that the beholder can actually interfere with a finished art work illustrates that he has seized control from the artist and that he has an active role in the construction of meaning. On the one hand, the description of Antinous reinforces the idea of typology, of a repertoire of gestures which elicit the same response in all beholders. Our shared perceptual apparatus means that we have similar reactions to Antinous: we like his regular features and his healthy air which denotes happiness. But the slightest change to just one feature creates a mocking smile or an air of falseness which makes us nervous and mistrustful. Yet Diderot goes on to point out that our responses to people are not universal but are dependent on various factors such as age or the vagaries of taste. At eighteen, Diderot admits, he would have been drawn to a pert young girl with a snub nose, yet maturity has led him to prefer modesty and delicacy. Hence he draws attention to the subjectivity of the human response.

In this passage Diderot shows that physiognomical judgements are intimately linked to our ideas of virtue and vice:

> Si l'âme d'un homme ou la nature a donné à son visage l'expression de la bienveillance, de la justice et de la liberté, vous le sentirez, parce que vous portez en vous-même des images de ces vertus, et vous accueillerez celui qui vous les annonce. Ce visage est une lettre de recommandation écrite dans une langue commune à tous les hommes (p. 699).

The 'letter of recommendation' is a set phrase of contemporary physiognomical writing. This description of our attraction to or repulsion from other people — either real or painted — is redolent of sensualist theories of physiognomics such as those of Bougeant and Condillac which were discussed in Chapter 1. Positive and negative sensations provoked in the beholder-physiognomist by other people are translated into judgements of beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice: 'Quel que soit le caractère de l'homme, si sa physionomie habituelle est conforme à l'idée que vous avez d'une vertu, il vous attirera; si sa physionomie habituelle est conforme à l'idée que vous avez d'un vice, il vous éloignera' (p. 698). Clearly such a process is fraught with moral complications and Diderot is hesitant about asserting that nature always puts good people into beautiful bodies and bad people into ugly ones, hence his qualifier, 'quel que soit le caractère de l'homme'.

Diderot's argument develops into a discussion of the moral purpose of art. In life, he claims, our judgements of people are formed in a subjective way, just like the young Diderot who was swayed by a voluptuous young woman. He argues that with art we must be able to switch off our intuitive responses and abstract to more universal and noble passions: 'Il faut à tout moment donner le change à la passion, en empruntant des termes généraux et abstraits' (p. 698). Many times in his writing on aesthetics, Diderot suggests that painting should give off clear signals so as to inspire appropriate responses in the spectator: pleasure in virtue; hatred of vice. In this context, he maintains that good art can and should polarise our instinctive judgements of virtue and vice: it is by responding to beautiful or ugly heads in painting that we will succeed in sharpening our moral senses. The process of analysis is more objective and therefore more effective than in our everyday encounters because it takes place in a neutral or abstract realm. In other words, Diderot appears to be putting the case for a sort of generalised physiognomics which operates solely in an artistic domain, a set of signs which are universally legible and morally improving. In the light of this, Diderot's assertion 'L'expression est faible ou fausse si elle laisse incertain sur le sentiment' reads rather differently from the way in which it first appeared: rather than a Le Brunian schema of passions on the canvas, the comment appears to refer to the beholder's own 'sentiment', not just in the sense of the passions provoked by a particular

image, but also in terms of the (correct) moral judgement provoked by its sensual apprehension.

Therefore, though fascinated by the notion of a universal set of gestures and facial expressions, Diderot subscribes only partially to the notion of typology. Similarly, he explores the idea of type, or stereotype, alluding to the mythical qualities of the savage: the robust virility of the male and the naked fecundity of his female companion. But at the same time, Diderot is sensible to individual difference, to each person's unique physiology. In the chapter on expression, he launches into a eulogy of facial difference: 'Dans chaque partie du monde, chaque contrée; dans une même contrée, chaque province; dans une province, chaque ville; dans une ville, chaque famille; dans une famille, chaque individu; dans un individu, chaque instant a sa physionomie, son expression' (p. 696). From a global perspective, Diderot gradually closes in on just one face, and then on just one moment of a face, alluding to both poles of infinity. Not only is every face in the world unique, but this difference is infinitely multiplied because each momentary expression is different from the last. This assertion places him at the opposite end of the spectrum from Le Brun's fixed and finite entities. Diderot's vocabulary of nature is infinite, yet as is the case with Watelet's multiplicity, this becomes virtually impossible to translate into an infinite vocabulary of painting. When Diderot upbraids Michel Van Loo in the *Salon de 1767* for failing to represent a single one of his 'cent physionomies diverses', he expresses a very real problem, in that the language of representation has in some way to be clearer yet cruder than nature.[16]

Diderot, like Bougeant and Buffon, outlines a conception of character which is wholly governed by the passions. Identity is momentary and each passion has its physiognomy, its characteristic expression. He uses the recurring eighteenth-century motif of the individual's physical identity being formed by the repetitive action of successive habitual passions: 'On se fait à soi-même quelquefois sa physionomie. Le visage, accoutumé à prendre le caractère de la passion dominante, le garde'. Sometimes, however, nature overrides this: 'Quelquefois aussi on la reçoit de la nature; et il faut bien la garder comme on l'a reçue. Il lui a plu de nous faire bons et de nous donner le visage du méchant; ou de nous faire méchants et de nous donner le visage de la bonté' (p. 698).

But as well as this weathering of the body through internal causes, Diderot evokes the external weathering of the body due to physical circumstances and thus, like Cochin, he adapts contemporary theories of *climat* into a theory of physiognomy. The poor children of the Faubourg Saint Marceau develop 'la physionomie de la halle et du marché' (p. 698). Each social *condition* is conditioned, developing a distinctive face and bodily posture: 'Dans la société, chaque ordre de citoyens a son caractère et son

expression; l'artisan, le noble, le roturier, l'homme de lettres, l'ecclésiastique, le magistrat, le militaire. Parmi les artisans, il y a des habitudes de corps, des physionomies de boutiques et d'ateliers' (p. 699). Even the form of government has an effect on people's faces: a republican will be proud; under a despot, the only beauty will be the submissive face of the slave. Diderot suggests not so much that there is an intrinsic difference between social orders (unlike Félibien for instance), but rather that each individual follows a particular trajectory through life, and that those who follow similar patterns develop similar physical characteristics which then determine their moral make-up. Despite their common starting point, Diderot reaches a different view of social conditioning from Cochin: the latter suggests that, by coming together in society, cultural distinctions are eroded, whereas Diderot maintains that these distinctions are reinforced.

Therefore in Diderot's theory, the planetary determinism of traditional physiognomy is reformulated into a physical and social determinism. Elsewhere, Diderot argues that society forces people to take up certain modes of behaviour, certain 'positions'. Like Watelet, Diderot maintains that society imposes certain constraints on people, yet unlike him, he does not dwell on the uniformity of social behaviour, but rather on its artifice or, in some cases, its exaggeration. Posture becomes posturing, of which Rameau's nephew serves as a grotesque reminder. The famous dancing master, Marcel, is vilified in the chapter on expression for reinforcing these affectations through his teaching. Here Diderot borrows from Hogarth the image of Marcel instructing Antinous to take on a stiff and mannered pose, thereby losing the *insouciant* grace and suppleness of his original state.

The discussion of manner is continued in the *Salon de 1767*. Diderot claims that expression in life and art is inevitably mannered:

> L'expression est *maniérée* en cent façons diverses. Il y a dans l'art, comme dans la société, les fausses grâces, la minauderie, l'afféterie, le précieux, l'ignoble, la fausse dignité ou la morgue, la fausse gravité ou la pédanterie, la fausse douleur, la fausse pitié; on fait grimacer tous les vices, toutes les vertus, toutes les passions; ces grimaces sont quelquefois dans la nature; mais elles déplaisent toujours dans l'imitation; nous exigeons qu'on soit homme, même au milieu des plus violents supplices.[17]

He argues that manner is a sign of the moral corruption and decadence of a nation, and implied in his words is a criticism of the Rococo and the empty vanities of a society wedded to 'luxe'. Yet he also suggests that art is mannered precisely because it is not nature. This in itself is not blameworthy: rather, he claims that the artist has a duty to find ways in which to bring his work closer to nature so as to avoid manner. Unlike the pupils of the Académie, who are starved of models from nature until it is too late, and whose introduction to drawing from life is the stiff and strained models of the *académie*, or life-class,

the artist must seek out the right kind of nature.[18] He points out exactly what he means by this in the chapter on expression: Grimm stretched out in a chair, his dressing gown loose, his night-cap drooping over his eyes is 'tout à fait pittoresque et beau' and a perfect subject for the artist. Not so for the stiff, artificial posture of a second later which Grimm leaps into, 'se maniérant, se marcélisant', as a visitor is announced (pp. 702-03). Diderot sees in this private state of absorption the eradication of the instituted signs of human interaction: there is a lack of self-consciousness in such a state which Diderot equates with true expression, an idea which also appears in his writing on theatre.

It appears that, for Diderot, all human beings have a certain physiognomical intuition in that they interpret faces according to their sensory perceptions and build up a stock of images, a repertoire of pleasant and unpleasant faces. But a real 'physionomiste' is required to have more, namely a strong imagination. This is fuelled by experience of the raw passions of human life, both in the flesh and in books: 'Il faut avoir étudié le bonheur et la misère de l'homme dans toutes ses faces; des batailles, des famines, des pestes, des inondations, des orages, des tempêtes; la nature sensible, la nature inanimée, en convulsion. Il faut feuilleter les historiens, se remplir des poètes, s'arrêter sur leurs images' (p. 700). Only then will the artist create works of passion. And it must be remembered that art for Diderot is about strong passions. The remainder of the chapter on expression consists of a comparison of the grand voluptuousness of Classical civilisation and its pagan religion, with the 'triste et plate métaphysique' of the Christian tradition. Classical artists and poets, according to Diderot, were inspired by their heightened surroundings to create works of great feeling. In contrast, the poverty of images furnished by Christianity with its emphasis on suffering and denial do not serve to inspire the artist.

For the artist, then, the real physiognomical skill is the ability to envisage characters in one's mind's eye, forming an ideal model. This is borne out by Diderot's parallel assertion in *De la poésie dramatique* (1758): 'Tout peintre, tout poète dramatique sera physionomiste' (p. 249). The successful dramatist, having sketched out characters and situations, forms a picture in his head of his characters' physical appearance and this image enables him to write the scene with fitting poetic dialogue. However, Diderot cautions that this should be an imaginary picture and that actors' features are irrelevant.

It seems therefore that, in Diderot's chapter on expression, the issue of the representation of the passions on canvas is displaced and superseded by the more intangible communication of 'sentiment' between artist and beholder. Another look at the opening sentence, 'L'expression est en général l'image d'un sentiment', tends to make one think less of Le Brun than of the 'sentiment' of the artist or beholder. Diderot had for some time been aware of

the discrepancy between the workings of the soul and the ability to process it into verbal or visual language, as the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (1751) suggests:

> Autre chose est l'état de notre ame, autre chose le compte que nous en rendons, soit à nous-mêmes, soit aux autres, autre chose que la sensation totale et instantanée de cet état, autre chose l'attention successive et détaillée que nous sommes forcés d'y donner pour l'analyser, la manifester et nous faire entendre. Notre âme est un tableau mouvant d'après lequel nous peignons sans cesse: nous employons bien du temps à le rendre avec fidélité; mais il existe en entier et tout à la fois: l'esprit ne va pas à pas comptés comme l'expression.[19]

In art, even the most rapid depictions of movement will not catch up with our souls. The soul feels passions instantaneously and yet the translation of these passions into verbal or visual language for the purposes of communication is necessarily successive, involving a time lag; however, the non-linguistic communication of 'sentiment' between artist and beholder may act as a short cut. Roger de Piles had suggested that templates of the passions are subservient to the artist's imagination and the communication of feeling to the beholder, and Diderot seems boldly to restate this. The canvas acts as the meeting point of the artist's and the beholder's sensibility, and the painted passions are merely a process of mediation, a means to an end, a partial strategy for the artist.

Analysis of key texts on expression by these three aesthetic commentators of the mid-eighteenth century reveals a number of common themes. The primacy of the passions is established, and these are conceived in accelerated form: the discussion is now about movement, simultaneity and nuance. Facial diversity becomes more of an issue than ever before, because of the awareness of variety in nature and also of cultural differences between races, social ranks and individuals. This is doubly the case since the individual is frequently conceived as a shifting phenomenon, governed by the moving passions. The writers also cast a critical eye over contemporary civilisation, judging the role of expression, or the lack of it, in social behaviour. From these criteria, various problems arise for the artist: firstly, how to render this increased movement within a static artistic medium; secondly, whether to opt for diversity in representation at the expense of clarity or to aim for a generalised representation; finally, where to seek proper models in nature, given that human interaction appears to be so constrained and full of artifice. These issues, explored in theory in this chapter, will be examined in practice in the next three chapters, respectively on La Tour, the Prix Caylus and Greuze.

NOTES

1. An account of some of these issues is given in John Montgomery Wilson, *The Painting of the Passions in Theory, Practice and Criticism in Later Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Garland, 1981).
2. *L'Esthétique des Lumières* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 59.
3. Joshua Reynolds seeks a reconciliation of ideal and empirical approaches in his Discourses to the Royal Academy: *Discourses on Art* (Menston, Yorks: Scholar Press, 1971).
4. See James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 7-10; Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism* (London: Penguin, 1966), pp. 17-32.
5. Typical is La Font de St Yenne's criticism of Boucher: 'Il seroit cependant assez difficile de deviner l'Eloquence par la physionomie de la figure qui la représente, et qui est extrêmement froide et sans caractère'. *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* (La Haye, 1747), p. 75. Diderot comments famously on the cacophony of Boucher's painting: 'C'est le plus grand ennemi du silence que je connoisse', *Salon de 1765* in *Salons*, ed. by Jean Seznec, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), II, 76. All subsequent references to Diderot's *Salons* are from this edition. Such criticisms are obviously at variance with the modern interpretation of the Rococo as embodying elegance, movement, even eloquence. See Mary Vidal, *Watteau's Painted Conversations: Art, Literature and Talk in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century France* (New York/London: Yale University Press, 1992).
6. *Essais sur la peinture*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1988), p. 701. All subsequent page references are from this edition.
7. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols (Paris, 1751-65), XII (1765), 151. Much the same point is made by Sulzer in the article 'Caractère' in the *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie* (Amsterdam, 1776-77), V (1776), 230.
8. *Encyclopédie*, VI (1756), 319.
9. *Recueil de quelques pièces concernant les arts*, 2 vols (Paris, 1757-71), I, 126.
10. See Roger Mercier, 'La Théorie des climats des "Réflexions critiques" à "L'Esprit des lois"', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 53 (1953), 17-37, 159-74.
11. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of Moreau de la Sarthe's incorporation of Diderot into his edition of Lavater.
12. See Jacques Proust, 'Diderot et la physiognomonie', *CAIEF*, 13 (1961), 317-29 (p. 320).
13. See especially Jean Starobinski, *L'Invention de la liberté 1700-1789* (Geneva: Skira, 1964), p. 135.
14. Proust attempts rather literally to categorise the poses of *La Religieuse* and other works according to Le Brunian configurations. His view of Le Brun as clichéd and simplistic (p. 328) must be refuted.
15. *Encyclopédie*, XVI (1765), 254.
16. *Salons*, III, 67.
17. *Salons*, III, 338. Marian Hobson has observed the slippage in this passage from manner as affectation to manner as exaggeratedly expressive. 'Diderot, the Academy and Manner' in *The French Academy*, ed. by June Hargrove (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), pp. 116-30.
18. See his criticisms of the *académie* in chapter 1 of the *Essais sur la peinture*, and of the Académie's training programme in the introduction to the *Salon de 1765*.
19. *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Roger Lewinter, 15 vols (Paris: Club français du livre, 1969-73), II, 543.

CHAPTER 4

LA TOUR AND MATERIALIST PHYSIOGNOMICS

Maurice-Quentin de La Tour (1704-1788) has more than once been labelled a 'physiognomist'. As one of the most successful and prodigious pastel portraitists of his time, he had uniquely privileged access to the key figures of mid-eighteenth century Paris: Voltaire, Rousseau, Buffon, d'Alembert, Crébillon, the actress Clairon, the composer Rameau, the Maréchal de Saxe and Madame de Pompadour all sat to him.[1] The Goncourts, inspired by nostalgia for the brilliance of a lost age, hailed him as a 'prodigieux physionomiste' in their *L'Art du dix-huitième siecle* (1881).[2] For them, he reflected the truism of the eighteenth century that no two faces were the same. In less effusive tones, Maurice Barrès, describing a visit in 1891 to the museum in La Tour's home town of Saint Quentin, where many of his pastels are exhibited to this day, dubbed the artist a 'minutieux physionomiste'.[3] Barrès was struck by what he saw as the clinical precision of La Tour's observation, his portraits arranged like scientific specimens and recorded with the chilling accuracy of the taxonomist. More recently, La Tour has been seen loosely as 'physiognomical' in terms of his psychological realism.[4] Whilst it may be argued that all portrait painters are physiognomists, seeking to display an intangible self through visible forms, La Tour appears to pay particular attention to mental processes. His portraits formed part of a contemporary vogue for naturalism in portraiture, found also in the work of Tocqué and Aved, where the frank depiction of blemishes and irregularities was exploited in order to give psychological insights into the sitter.[5]

What, therefore, does it mean to describe La Tour as a physiognomist? The above examples illustrate the degree of latitude in the term, for they point to very different aspects of his work. I stated at the beginning of this book that physiognomy is a constantly shifting phenomenon, and that the best way to understand it is in relation to a specific historical context. It is therefore meaningful to examine La Tour in terms of contemporary theories of physiognomy. La Tour was himself aware of his ability to capture the essence of his sitters and is said to have described his technique as follows: 'Ils croient que je ne saisis que les traits de leur visage, mais je descends au fond d'eux-mêmes à leur insu, & je les remporte tout entiers'.[6] This metaphor of delving inside his sitters to bring out their inner essence or wholeness bears the imprint of the physiognomy of his day, such as the empirical stance, moving from the outside inwards, and the artist-physiognomist's privileged vision which enables him to see beyond surface detail.

This chapter has two parts. The function of the first part is to reinforce patterns of thought already established. It shows that La Tour exhibits several characteristics of the 'Enlightened Physiognomics' which were outlined in Chapter 1, and also that he exemplifies the contemporary aesthetic of nuance and variety defined in Chapter 3. The second part is more unorthodox in that it departs from a strictly historical approach. It develops the idea of a materialist physiognomics which was uncovered in the work of Bougeant and La Mettrie, and uses it to interpret the work of the pastel portraitist in an unusual fashion. It also teases out some of the fundamental assumptions behind physiognomy itself. La Tour was not himself a materialist, although he was friends with Diderot and Helvétius and undoubtedly came into contact with d'Holbach in Paris literary circles; however, his particular brand of portraiture and his preferred medium, pastel, can be seen to reflect contemporary theories of materialism, its perception of the universe, and of human identity.

* * *

La Tour's most productive period was between the mid-1740s and the mid-1760s. This coincides with the publication of Bougeant's *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* in 1746 and Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* between 1749 and 1767. La Tour's work displays many parallels with their physiognomical theories. For all three, the face alone is perceived as sufficient to determine character, charged with meaning because of its very immediacy. One can also detect the influence of Le Brun in La Tour's emphasis on the head as distinct from the rest of the body. La Tour's portraits are striking for their close-up focus and their intense expressions. The majority depict merely the head and shoulders, with some half-length portraits. Most emphatic are his preparatory sketches which represent an isolated, free-floating head independent of shoulders, clothes and other attributes. The head of Madame Masse is striking for its revelation of the process of composition (Plate 6b). La Tour clearly strives to capture the essential parts of the face before filling in peripheral details, and the highly worked faces contrast with the loosely drawn background where even hair counts as an attribute. The practice of working on the face before commencing the surroundings is not necessarily peculiar to La Tour, for in many portrait studios of the time, the master would paint in the face, the part considered to require the most skill, and would then leave hair, clothes and décor to apprentices and drapery painters. But here the motive was commercial rather than aesthetic, enabling the fashionable portraitist to execute the maximum number of commissions. La Tour, in contrast, seems to have a well-determined aesthetic strategy, for the intrinsic interest is held in the immediacy of eyes, nose and mouth.

Most of La Tour's portraits do not rely on attributes such as books, globes or furnishings to function as indirect statements of character or social status.[7] This is similar to the rejection of metoposcopy and chiromancy by Bougeant and Buffon, and their assertion that man is a free-standing and self-referential being. Renaissance portraiture has some stunning examples of the interweaving of humoral characterology and astrology with more mimetic depictions of individuals in a perfect *mise en scène* of the doctrine of the *signatures*: the sitter's astrological configuration is represented in the decorative background, humoral symbolism is reflected in the facial features and colouring, yet the portrait also strives for a recognisable human likeness.[8] In contrast, La Tour's faces are isolated and independent and only their individual features give clues to the character.

Bougeant and La Tour share an inductive, conjectural approach, involving observation and the gradual build-up of detail, so that the tasks of the portraitist and the physiognomist overlap. For both, this requires a certain intimacy: just as Bougeant's physiognomist approaches close to the subject, so proximity to the sitter is a characteristic of La Tour's work and an essential strategy for the pastellist. In a letter to Marigny, La Tour explains how pastellists, more than other types of artist, are obliged to sit no more than two or three feet from the model which causes the greatest problems for the execution of the portrait:

> Il faudroit être à ma place pour sentir les efforts que je fais pour mettre une figure & une teste ensemble dans les règles de la perspective. Les angles sont si courts que la personne qu'on peint de près ne peut pas regarder de ses deux yeux à la fois l'oeil du peintre. Ils vont & viennent sans être jamais ensemble. C'est pourtant de leur parfait accord que résulte l'âme & la vie du peintre.[9]

Here La Tour suggests that the sitter's gaze is constantly in motion because the eyes cannot focus on a distant fixed point. It appears, therefore, that the sitter is exposed to the penetrating gaze of the portraitist in the same way that the physiognomical subject is exposed to Bougeant's gaze and the relationship is precariously balanced between intimacy and intrusion. For the beholder too, the relationship is one of troubling proximity. Life-size heads stare out, looking straight out at the beholder, inviting contemplation from close to and on an equal level. But, just as with Bougeant one has the uneasy sensation of mutual physiognomising, equally with La Tour's heads, many of which disingenuously meet the gaze of the onlooker, one wonders who is actually staring the hardest.

Instead of being the domain of the 'expert' — the scholar, physician or soothsayer — Bougeant's physiognomy is the prerogative of the *mondain*, and analysing faces is posited as a spontaneous and universal human activity, even if it is also conceived as a form of cultivated seeing, similar to connoisseurship.

In the same way, portrait-painting is a fundamentally social activity. Tocqué, La Tour's fellow portraitist and academician, in a lecture on portraiture to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1750, stresses the importance of a certain kind of social interaction for the portraitist: 'La bonne compagnie seule peut nous mettre en état d'exprimer vivement, noblement et avec délicatesse les passions de l'âme si difficiles à rendre en peinture'.[10] His point is that artists should observe people at their ease in society, as this will provide good examples of unaffected behaviour for their own work. La Tour himself fits the definition of a *mondain*, as he circulated freely amongst Paris intellectuals and aristocrats, and took part in *salon* culture in the capital.[11] He also took pains to acquire an all-round education, considered fitting in a man of letters, despite Mariette's sardonic dismissal of him as a failed intellectual.[12]

Notwithstanding the obvious constraint on portrait-painters of having to supply favourable images to those who commission them, La Tour does not detract from the dignity of the sitter but instead combines this with a patient study of human irregularities. This tolerance is reminiscent of Bougeant's assertion that 'les hommes sont plus fous que méchans' (p. 26). Other works reveal a tendency to compensate for physical deficiency, for example the portrait of the minor still-life painter Jean-Nicolas Vernezobre (Plate 7a). The artist's sallow complexion and the shadows around the eyes and temples are enhanced by the deep reds and blues of his cap and robe, and his bushy eyebrows appear to be in dialogue with the erratic fur trim of his cap.

In fact, though La Tour's heads appear in isolation, they give subtle clues as to the cultural setting. Women such as Madame Masse display a fashionable 'embonpoint'.[13] His portraits reflect a society at ease with itself, evident in their knowing smiles. The smile was a common feature of French portraiture of this time and it was often united with a wide-eyed gaze, something which was anatomically impossible, yet aesthetically desirable. Yet the smile was highly problematic for portrait painters because it could so quickly turn into a simper or mocking grimace, and French portraiture was often criticised for its falseness.[14] Writing in the *Spectator* in 1711, Addison remarks pointedly on the 'smirking Air' of French portraiture which is 'bestowed indifferently on every Age and Degree of either Sex'.[15] It is this aspect of La Tour's work which has led Jean Starobinski to counter the orthodox 'physiognomical' interpretations of La Tour's work as possessing psychological depth. Instead he sees La Tour's faces as resolutely unphysiognomic in that they reflect only the 'singeries', the 'mines', the mannered and empty gestures of fashionable society which do not give access to moral truth.[16] As such, he echoes Watelet's lament that society is impenetrable because it does not reveal its true passions.

At the heart of La Tour's portraits is movement and the momentary. Rather than hard bone structures, they emphasise the flesh parts of the face,

something which can vividly be seen in the Abbé Pommyer's dimpled smile with its rounded cheeks and full lips, together with the irrepressible sparkle in his eye (Plate 7b). He forcibly represents this world, and indeed this instant rather than the next. The impression of movement is enhanced through slight asymmetries in the features: the left hand side of Jean Nicolas Vernezobre's face is higher than the right, and the irregularity is exaggerated by the backwards slope of his cap. Such differences in the size and placing of features were exploited by other artists, such as the sculptor Houdon. Such a concentration on the moving facial parts rather than the fixed ones is strongly reminiscent both of Buffon's *pathognomy* and Watelet's accelerated version of it, involving multiplicity and nuance. The sense of movement is enhanced by technique: there are no hard lines and contours, only soft pastel strokes. An emphasis on the momentary is not exclusive to La Tour but is evident in other contemporary portraits. Tocqué suggests in his lecture that beauty can be perceived in the moving parts of the face even when this is not true of the face at rest: 'Ce n'est donc point aux depens de l'ensemble des traits qu'il faut donner de la beauté; c'est en étudiant les variétés dont les traits sont susceptibles dans les instants de joie, de tristesse ou de rêverie' (p. 25).

La Tour's conception of portraiture ties in with contemporary theories of character as shifting and ungraspable. Capturing a constantly moving face is an elusive task as La Tour himself recognises: 'Que d'attentions, que de combinaisons, que de recherches pénibles pour conserver l'unité de mouvements malgré les changements que produit sur la physionomie et dans les formes la succession des pensées et des affections de l'âme. C'est un nouveau portrait à chaque changement'.[17] Such a conception of portraiture as instantaneous could not be more different from Jonathan Richardson's assertion that a portrait should sum up the whole life of a person, that 'to sit for one's Picture, is to have an Abstract of one's Life written'.[18] La Tour is attentive to the moving passions, and the suggestion that this is where the essence of the individual lies rather than in any idea of permanent character. Like the character sketch of the Chevalier de *** in Bougeant's *Lettres*, La Tour's portraits suggest that their sitters have many characters rather than just one. His works also convey visually the literary topos of character being built up from the effects of the repeated passions in the trajectory through life (found in Buffon and Rousseau amongst others). The weathering of the face is visible in the techniques of pastel: men's faces are criss-crossed with lines in the drawing technique known as hatching, creating a swarthy effect; women's portraits are smudged with the finger to give them a smooth complexion.

* * *

Physiognomy is usually understood to consist of the interplay of exterior and interior, manifest and hidden, body and soul. In other words, it rests on a fundamental notion of dualism. Eighteenth-century physiognomy, as outlined in Chapter 1, emphasised this dualism even more than previous epochs: the physiognomy of the Renaissance was dependent on multiple networks of correspondences in nature rather than a basic inner-outer relationship, and the difference between physical and moral qualities was rendered almost negligible by a conception of the physical resemblance between them; the comparative model of the seventeenth century, through its tripartite form, sought to avoid the arbitrary and subjective nature of causal relationships between somatic and spiritual realms; however, the empirical, observational study of surfaces in eighteenth-century physiognomy, together with its view of man as an independently functioning being, encouraged binary thought patterns and dualistic modes of perception.

Despite this overarching dualism, it was noted in Chapter 1 that Bougeant's physiognomy also betrays materialist leanings. Several times he dismisses speculation on the nature of the soul as irrelevant to the aims of physiognomy, suggesting instead that people's innate characters are formed by the unique configuration of their bodily parts, and therefore that physiology rather than metaphysics is the key to understanding the perplexities of human nature. In so doing, Bougeant escapes the dominant structures of physiognomical thought which determine inner-outer and physical-moral equivalences. A materialist physiognomics, which might initially be regarded as an oxymoron, seems possible.

Materialism is also reflected in the work of La Tour where the physicality of his subjects is ever-present. In his naturalistic portraits of the bourgeoisie, the beholder is confronted with the unabashed truth of the human face, a sagging jaw, the shadow of a beard. This type is epitomised by the portrait of Antoine-Gaspard Grimod de La Reynière, *fermier général* and reputed *gastronome* (Plate 8a). The picture exudes a wealthy, one could say epicurean, self-satisfaction: the financier is dressed in a rich red velvet jacket with a conspicuous gold trim and heavy lace cuffs. He looks down at the beholder across a hefty paunch, suggestive of his various appetites, its bulk exaggerated by his left hand which is tucked into his jacket. This posture was commonplace in eighteenth-century portraiture, but was rare in a seated pose, being more commonly used to counteract the verticals of a full-length figure. The squat triangular formation of the torso also contributes to the sense of ponderousness, as does the large stiff right sleeve. This impression is completed by the excesses of La Reynière's heavy-jowled face and his fleshy right hand. Such materiality even extended into the circumstances of the

work's production, for artist and sitter squabbled lengthily over the work's price.[19]

Portraiture has perenially been criticised as an inferior genre, functioning on the plane of the everyday, the concrete, the real. This attitude was reflected in particularly acute fashion in the official view of art at the height of La Tour's career, when portraiture came a very poor second to history painting in the hierarchy of the genres. During the shake-up of the Académie in 1747, legislation was even introduced to promote history painting which involved reducing the prices which portrait painters could charge for their work. Many art critics conspired in this derogation of the genre, although later in the century portraiture was viewed much more favourably in official circles.[20] The political reasons for this demotion of portraiture were numerous and complex, but in aesthetic terms the move was justified because the skills of the history painter were deemed to be greater, requiring all-round scholarship as well as artistic gifts in order to reach a generalised ideal. Tocqué's speech on portraiture to the Académie, striking for being the only lecture on this subject in the years following the reforms, works hard to dispel the notion of portraiture's inferiority. It suggests that the portrait is capable of expressive eloquence, giving access to the soul, qualities deemed officially to be intrinsic to history painting but not necessarily to portraiture.

But more than genre or subject matter, it is La Tour's medium which is most reflective of materialism. Pastel is the materialist medium par excellence: composed of dust and powder, it assumes the very substance of the subjects it portrays. The portrait and its referent literally become one, for the work of art is simultaneously flesh and dust in one great celebration of monism. The powder of the pastel merges with face powder or with the powder of a wig, scattering itself over the velvet shoulders of a jacket, as can be seen in the portrait of La Reynière. Similarly, the Abbé Pommyer is portrayed, his wig a white cloud blending into the background hues and leaving behind a trail of dust over his black vestments. Pastel is even more symbolic of materialism than the image of the crumbled statue in Diderot's *Rêve de d'Alembert* (1769) which is indirectly 'eaten', thereby continuing the ceaseless circulation of molecules in the world. As Diderot says to d'Alembert in the preamble to the *Rêve* which discusses the principle of universal sensibility: 'On fait du marbre avec de la chair, et de la chair avec du marbre'.[21] This image, involving a range of organic processes, has an inevitable time lapse, yet pastel has a potent immediacy, suggesting space, movement and tactility.

The immediacy of pastel also suggests transience. Characterised by its evanescence, pastel triumphantly fails to satisfy the criterion of durability, of survival for posterity which is so crucial to eighteenth-century aesthetics. In his *Salon de 1767*, Diderot draws a striking contrast between the permanence of

Chardin's work, and the fragility of La Tour's portraits which he sees as composed of mortal dust: 'O La Tour!', he apostrophises, invoking the well-known maxim from the Book of Genesis, 'Memento homo, quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris'.[22] Described by the Goncourts as 'cette peinture de coquetterie, flottante, à demi fixée', pastel also epitomises the Rococo, being suggestive of all that is brilliant and beautiful, whimsical and superficial (I, 326). A measure of the anxiety felt, of the longing to transcend the vapidity of the fashionable moment, is the struggle throughout the century to find a method of fixing pastel, a varnish which would not discolour or destroy the picture. Inevitably, pastel was attacked as a symbol of *vanitas*. Technically it was considered an easy medium, being quick to execute and yielding immediately satisfying results, and this also meant that it was extremely lucrative. Portraiture has always been disparaged for its supposed panderings to bourgeois vanities, for being grossly economical with the physical truths of the sitters; but the hack pastel portraitist, dashing off scores of portraits in a week, was seen to epitomise these extremes. La Tour, considered to have reached the high point of his art, was usually spared this criticism but Mariette accuses even him of being a 'peintre banal' for these very reasons.[23]

Cochin evokes this *vanitas* image in one of his satirical pieces, an 'Avis aux Dames', originally published in the *Mercure de France* in 1755. He claims that it is a myth that women spend a long time at their toilette: those who are idle enough to have adopted wigs must be in need of some other labour-saving beauty aids. He suggests that the pastellists might be able to help out:

> Le sieur Loriot a trouvé le secret de fixer les pastels, sans altérer la beauté des couleurs. Il seroit donc facile de se faire une fois bien peindre les joues, soit dans la maniere noble, c'est-à-dire tranchée, soit dans la maniere bourgeoise, c'est à dire, imitant le naturel. On pourroit s'adresser à quelqu'un des Peintres en pastel, dont Paris fourmille, & ensuite fixer cette couleur de telle maniere que rien ne puisse l'altérer.[24]

The allusion to Loriot refers to one of the more notorious incidents in the history of fixing pastel.[25] The 'maniere noble' of making up the face was that of sharply contrasting areas of white powder and spots of rouge, whereas the 'maniere bourgeoise' was a seemingly more discreet, 'natural' use of make-up. Through the comparison with make-up it is suggested that pastel portraits are as vain as women's vanity, but what also comes across is the blurring of art and artifice where two different types of painting faces are equated. It should be remembered that in England at this time, portraiture was also known as 'face-painting'. Cochin delivers his final blow when he states that women could economise by using blue powder instead of rouge which, as every painter knows, is the most expensive to manufacture.

But a materialist physiognomics makes it possible to abandon the notion of an elusive moral essence. Once it is posited that the self is contained within

the physical configuration of the art work, rather than being buried beneath the surface or in some immaterial realm, surface is an end in itself. All is texture and colour, the *éclat* of the picture being created by light falling on an uneven surface, and the fascination is in the momentary arrangement of particles. The grains are separate from one another and the loose build-up of powder gives an impression of space and movement, of the free circulation of molecules in the universe. La Tour's Abbé Pommyer appears replete with life, health and animation, and yet the dust on his shoulders could be read as a Christian symbol of mortality. But transposed from rigorous Christian morality into the atheistic framework of materialism, the transience of pastel becomes a liberating space.

Not only does the sitter merge with the work of art, the artist's body also intrudes into the pastel picture. If legend has it that Chardin applied paint with his fingers, one can actually see the touch of La Tour as he spreads and smooths the pastel. The artist's fingers and gestures merge with his material, as the material merges with the subject: all is one substance.

Diderot's famous description of La Tour at work in his *Salon de 1767* emphasises his unimpassioned method of working:

> J'ai vu peindre La Tour; il est tranquille et froid; il ne se tourmente point; il ne souffre point; il ne halète point; il ne fait aucune de ces contorsions du modeleur enthousiaste, sur le visage duquel on voit se succéder les ouvrages qu'il se propose de rendre, et qui semblent passer de son âme sur son front, et de son front sur sa terre ou sur sa toile. Il n'imite point les gestes du furieux; il n'a point le sourcil relevé de l'homme qui dédaigne le regard de sa femme qui s'attendrit; il ne s'extasie point; il ne sourit point à son travail; il reste froid, et cependant son imitation est chaude.[26]

La Tour's performance could not be more different from the extreme physicality of the Neveu de Rameau's pantomime and has more in common with the actor in Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*: the portraitist does not mimic his subjects in order to feel and thereby understand their passions but instead executes his commissions with a cool efficiency. Behind this description lies Diderot's conception of the secondary status of portraiture: unlike the history painter who is inspired by enthusiasm, a quasi-mystical creative state, the portrait painter can never reach such heights because of the worldliness of his task. But it would be wrong to infer too much criticism of La Tour here: Diderot suggests only that he is bound by the constraints of his genre and, like Chardin, the painter of still-lifes, he is also described as a magician, his imitation 'chaude'. On the plane of the everyday, away from extravagantly imaginative compositions and the transports of enthusiasm, he is a 'machiniste merveilleux' (p. 169). Diderot goes on to explain that he uses the label 'machiniste' as he would with Vaucanson rather than Rubens. Jacques Vaucanson's highly popular and exquisitely crafted performing automata were

perfect illustrations of the principles of mechanism. Thus, in Diderot's view, La Tour is an 'homme machine' in the most positive sense.

The idea of a materialist physiognomics runs into the problem of individual identity. In several respects, materialism undermines the concept of individuality. This is suggested in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* where d'Alembert speaks in his sleep: 'Que voulez-vous donc dire avec vos individus? Il n'y en a point. Non, il n'y en a point... Il n'y a qu'un seul grand individu; c'est le tout [...] Et vous parlez d'essences, pauvres philosophes; laissez là vos essences'.[27] This view, where the only individual is 'le tout', the sum of all the particles of nature, is difficult if not impossible to equate with the individualising aims of portraiture. Materialism is also inherently deterministic: once the existence of the soul has been denied, the concept of free will becomes highly problematic, and human beings become almost the prisoners of their physical configurations.

Yet despite these caveats, a form of identity which is in keeping with materialist principles may be conceived of. This is the idea of a being whose identity is constantly shifting, a hint of which is given in d'Alembert's statement: 'Naître, vivre et passer, c'est changer de formes' (p. 98). Bougeant does not see his physiognomy as restrictive, but instead it is summed up by the boundless Chevalier de *** who is as changeable as a weather vane. Diderot matches this with his own materialist conception of the individual. He describes his own self as constantly on the move: 'J'avois en une journée cent physionomies diverses, selon la chose dont j'étois affecté. J'étois serein, triste, rêveur, tendre, violent, passionné, enthousiaste'.[28] Although he does not state this specifically, Diderot is literally a different person from one moment to the next because of the minute changes in his physical being. In fact he upbraids Michel Van Loo for his failure to capture a single one of these 'cent physionomies diverses' in his portrait of the *philosophe*. The comment is a reflection on the difficulties of portraiture which is similar to the words of La Tour, and an opinion which is often taken as evidence for Diderot's dissatisfaction with portraiture in general. But the comment also points to his own irrepressible nature which is impossible to delimit and determine. His conception of the self owes a lot to Montaigne, who also envisaged the self as changing from one moment to the next, but Diderot's vision is sharpened by his materialist views, and the idea that our selves are governed by the ceaseless flow of matter.[29]

Van Loo might have failed to capture what Diderot thought (or perhaps pretended) was his true self. Yet it seems likely that a form of materialist portraiture is possible which captures the individuality of a single instant. In such a case, the pastel portrait which through swift execution can capture the

momentary, and which constantly draws attention to its own transience may successfully embody this changing conception of the self.

La Tour's portraits are therefore emblematic of an eighteenth-century conception of physiognomy as it was defined in Chapter 1: concentration on the face, the physiognomist/artist as a *mondain*, the light-hearted but also slightly menacing relationship between artist and sitter. La Tour's work also enacts Watelet's aesthetics of motion. The exploration of a materialist physiognomics moves beyond the dualism intrinsic to Platonic and Christian traditions which governs artistic representation and the principles of physiognomy. Instead of seeking an insubstantial ideal, essential self or soul, a form of representation and a type of physiognomy appear to exist which are based on materialist notions of one substance. The intrinsic interest of his portraits is found to lie not in an intangible essence beyond the level of the visual but rather in the arrangement of matter, in the spreading and crumbling of the pastel. Finally, a materialist theory of identity develops the recurring theme of character as constantly in motion and changing from one moment to the next.

NOTES

1. See Christine Debrie, *Maurice-Quentin de la Tour 1704-1788* (Saint-Quentin: Albaron, 1991).
2. *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle*, 3 vols (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1881-1928) I, 361.
3. *Trois Stations de psychothérapie* (Paris: Perrin, 1891), p. 28. Barrès is critical of what he sees as La Tour's urge coolly to systematise the world with the meticulousness of the natural scientist. He is struck by the melancholy of the exhibits, the frozen faces which stare out from behind glass.
4. Debrie, p. 74.
5. David Wakefield, *French Eighteenth-Century Painting* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1984) identifies two distinct strains in eighteenth-century French portraiture; the bourgeois naturalism of Tocqué, Aved and La Tour, and the fashionable portraiture of Nattier, Drouais and Roslin with its mythological and fantasy settings.
6. Quoted in Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableaux de Paris*, 2nd edn, 12 vols (Amsterdam, 1782-88), II, 172.
7. Two exceptions to this are his royal commissions of Madame de Pompadour (Louvre) who is depicted surrounded by books and the attributes of the arts, and the double portrait of Marie-Josephe de Saxe and the Duc de Bourgogne (Saint-Quentin) where other members of the royal family are symbolically present in the surrounding décor. Such official portraiture is much less typical of La Tour's *œuvre* than his small-scale, informal 'bourgeois' portraits.
8. See Lorne Campbell's discussion of the portraits by Lucas Cranach the Elder of Johannes Cuspian and his wife: *Renaissance Portraits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 25. Disappointingly, Campbell later undermines her own argument by stating: 'The principles of physiognomy seem to be of limited relevance to portraiture' (p. 127).
9. *Correspondance inédite de Maurice-Quentin de la Tour*, ed. by Jules Guiffrey and Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Charavay, 1885), p. 11.
10. *Discours sur le genre du portrait*, ed. by Arnauld Doria (Paris: Jean Schmidt, 1930), p. 18.
11. La Tour is known to have regularly attended Madame Geoffrin's Monday salons for artists and also sometimes to have been present at her Wednesday salons for men of letters.
12. *Abécédario*, ed. by P. de Chennevières and A. de Montaiglon, 6 vols (Paris, 1851-60) [*Archives de l'art français*], III, p. 67.
13. Philippe Perrot, quoting from a *Manuel de la toilette et de la mode* (Paris 1771-80) and from *La Bibliothèque des dames*, states: 'Le visage idéal est fait d'un menton "rond et fourchu", de joues couvertes "d'un ferme embonpoint", d'un front "grand, ouvert, poli, bien arrondi [...]

également courbé dans les points qui se répondent"'. *Le Travail des apparences: Le Corps féminin XVIIIe-XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), p. 69.

14. Ernst Gombrich observes that society portraits often hovered between the serious and the smile, the pensive and the mocking: 'The Mask and the Face: The Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and Art', in *Art, Perception and Reality*, ed. by E.H. Gombrich et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 1-46 (p. 24).
15. *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, 354 (no. 83).
16. *L'Invention de la liberté 1700-1789* (Geneva: Skira, 1964), pp. 134-35.
17. *Correspondance inédite*, p. 11.
18. *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), p. 16.
19. Debrie, pp. 122-23.
20. See Jean Locquin, 'La Lutte des critiques d'art contre les portraitistes au XVIIIème siècle', *Archives de l'art français*, 7 (1913), 309-20. La Font de St Yenne, though highly critical of portraiture as a whole, is nevertheless lavish in his praise of La Tour and other portrait-painters: *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* (La Haye, 1747), p. 22, 85; *Sentimens sur quelques ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure* (n.p., 1754), pp. 132-33, 159-62.
21. *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Roger Lewinter, 15 vols (Paris: Club français du livre, 1969), VIII, 56.
22. This invocation does not appear in the Seznec edition of the *Salons*; however, it can be found in the Assézat edition of Diderot's works: *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by J. Assézat, 20 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1875-77), XI, 98.
23. *Abécédario*, p. 324.
24. *Recueil de quelques pièces concernant les arts*, 2 vols (Paris, 1757-71), I, 47.
25. See Jean Chatelus, *Peindre à Paris au XVIIIème siècle* (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1991), p. 69.
26. *Salons*, ed. by Jean Seznec, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), III, 168-69.
27. *Œuvres complètes*, VIII, 97-98.
28. *Salon de 1767* (III, 67).
29. See Jerome Schwartz, *Diderot and Montaigne: The 'Essais' and the Shaping of Diderot's Humanism* (Geneva: Droz, 1966).

CHAPTER 5

THE PRIX CAYLUS

The Prix Caylus, also known as the 'Prix de la tête d'expression', which was launched in 1759 at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture and first successfully awarded the following year, is a crucial reference point for the debate on facial expression in the mid-eighteenth century. In what was envisaged as an opportunity to improve on their treatment of facial expression, trainee artists drew or sculpted an expressive head in a three-hour sitting with a live model who was posed by the teacher in charge to represent a particular named passion. Working from life was seen by Caylus as an antidote to the dry copying of heads from drawing books or master works which had hitherto constituted the entire expressive training at the Académie and, in this respect, the Prix Caylus has often been compared with La Tour's *concours* for the study of a half-length figure including the hands which was held annually between 1784 and 1792 and which also used a live model; however, we shall see that it was criticised precisely for failing to achieve the naturalism which it aspired to. Historically, the *concours* was an improbable success, being held almost every year until the Revolution and surviving in the Académie des Beaux-Arts, now the Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, until the educational reforms of 1968, though over the years it changed much in practice and spirit. The focus of the present discussion, however, is on the early years, particularly the 1760s, which most reflect the influence and ideals of Caylus.

Despite its institutional success, it is my contention that, in aesthetic terms, the Prix C..ylus was a failure. Chapter 3 laid out a series of problems regarding facial expression in mid-eighteenth century French painting; Caylus's *concours* addresses these contradictions, yet ultimately it fails to reconcile them. Thomas Kirchner has claimed that, through his move towards naturalism, Caylus liberated academic teaching from a slavish adherence to Le Brun and thereby provided facial expression with a way out of a *cul-de-sac*.[1] But, on the contrary, I believe that Caylus was all too constrained by his understanding of Le Brun. It is certainly true that he seeks to distance himself from Le Brun and that many of his preoccupations are different from those of his academic predecessor. But in his insistence on the maximisation of facial expressivity, Caylus takes Le Brun's teaching to its furthest extreme and places the face under an almost unbearable strain. In other words, there is a literalness in Caylus's interpretation of Le Brun which proves unworkable. This is all the more obvious when it is recognised that Caylus was pursuing a Le Brunian approach to the representation of the passions precisely at a time when artists

such as Greuze were seeking alternative means of conveying expression, and were subverting or bypassing Le Brun in the process. It is here that we should look for the real way out of Kirchner's *cul-de-sac* and this is the subject of the next chapter.

But Caylus's *concours* is a highly interesting failure and is worthy of examination for this reason. Of particular interest is his approach to the moderate passions and to the relationship between passion and character. In this chapter I show that the *concours* is the nexus of the contemporary debate on expression and mirrors the arguments of the texts already analysed. Secondly, I look at Caylus's complex, sometimes paradoxical relationship with Le Brun. Finally, I focus on the underlying tendencies of the *concours* which are arguably of greater interest than Caylus's overt priorities. Much of the groundwork for this subject has already been done by Kirchner. Because of the unfamiliar nature of the subject matter, it has been necessary to map out the historical facts with some inevitable repetition; however, it will be clear that my own preoccupations are very different.

CAYLUS AND EXPRESSION

Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus (1672-1765) was a contradictory figure.[2] Antiquarian and archaeologist, art theorist, amateur engraver and author of licentious novels, he seems to be a striking blend of the reactionary and the libertine. Critical opinion has tended to stress his frosty conservatism, evoking his disputes with the more energetically 'liberal' Cochin and Diderot.[3] But we should beware of categorising Caylus solely as a figure of of academic orthodoxy at its most extreme, for his work also shows him to be something of a quirky innovator, and indeed both these qualities are apparent in his *concours*.

Although Caylus was made an *Amateur-Honoraire* in 1731, his real involvement with the Académie began in 1747 when Charles-Antoine Coypel was elected *Premier Peintre du Roi*. Caylus's association with Coypel through the Crozat circle and with Lenormant de Tournehem who had been *Surintendant des Bâtiments* since 1745 led him to take a prominent role in the shake-up of the Académie.[4] He was almost single-handedly responsible for the reform of the Academic teaching programme, and especially for the revival of *conférences*. Thus, he was consciously taking on a role which had been definitively carved out by Le Brun nearly a century before. Caylus's influence later declined, partly due to Coypel's death in 1752, and partly because of Cochin's rapid ascent to power which caused much animosity between the two men.[5] Caylus was therefore not at the height of his powers at the time of the *concours*, and the fact that he was obliged to finance the prize with his own money is evidence for his somewhat marginal position. But the official

endorsement of the Prix Caylus by the Académie suggests that it was still in keeping with academic doctrine.

Expression was a theme to which Caylus constantly returned in his lectures and writings on art. He voiced several criticisms of the painters of his day which he later attempted to resolve in his *concours*. In a move which must be interpreted more broadly as a rejection of Rococo values, Caylus blamed his old friend Watteau for the lack of passion and action in his figures: most of his compositions 'n'ont aucun objet. Elles n'expriment le concours d'aucune passion, et par conséquent, elles sont dépourvues d'une des plus piquantes parties de la peinture, je veux dire l'action'.[6] Caylus's words, spoken in 1748, read almost as a mission statement of the Académie: the reference to the Aristotelian concept of action, which was loudly restated by Alberti, directly relates to the ideals of history painting.

Caylus was critical of the lack of differentiation in faces painted by contemporary artists. In his lecture *Sur la manière et les moyens de l'éviter* delivered to the Académie on 2 September 1747, he exclaims: 'Que de peintres ont donné et donneront un air de famille à toutes les têtes qu'ils sont obligés de représenter! Peuvent-ils oublier ainsi la prodigieuse variété que la nature nous présente à chaque instant?'.[7] Cochin had used metaphors of family resemblance in a positive fashion, as giving a sense of unity and evoking ideal forms. Yet Caylus turns around the expression 'un air de famille', interpreting it as a lack of versatility on the artist's part. Caylus argues that modern artists may be excused for their imperfect representations of bodily form because, unlike the Greeks, they do not see naked bodies all around them, but holds that this excuse cannot apply to faces, with which they are constantly confronted. Caylus's sentiments echo those of Watelet and Cochin in that he posits expression and diversity as a specifically modern problem.

In fact there is a striking incompatibility between Caylus's roles as an impassioned antiquarian and as a spokesman on facial expression, despite the fact that these interests came together in his volume of three hundred heads, engraved after the *pierres gravées* in the Cabinet du Roi.[8] Most of these are profiled heads in oval surrounds in a restrained Classical style, reminiscent of old coins or medals, but the collection also reveals a penchant for caricature. Yet, as Caylus himself recognises in 'Sur la manière', few models for expression survive from antiquity, especially of the more moderate passions, and he is forced to turn to the Moderns and more importantly to nature for the greatest instruction. In this respect, therefore, Caylus is not an antiquarian *à la lettre*. Hence, rather than focusing on a 'dead' antiquity, Caylus is engaged quite literally in bringing the face to life.

Amongst the 'Moderns', Caylus's interest in facial expression was fuelled by his study of Leonardo da Vinci, who had himself devoted much time to

physiognomy and facial expression.[9] In 1730, Caylus collaborated with Mariette on a volume of engravings of Leonardo's character heads, the *Recueil de testes de caractere et de charges*.[10] Though Leonardo's grotesque caricatures, with their bulbous noses, protruding chins, sagging flesh and hollow eyes seem to have little in common with the exposition of the ideal, noble passions in accordance with the Académie's strictures on history painting, Mariette, in his preface to the collection, is explicit on the link between caricature and the serious study of the passions.[11] His argument subtly reformulates Annibale Carracci's famous dictum that ideal beauty and caricature are two sides of the same coin: they are exaggerations, but in opposite directions or, to quote Diderot's paraphrase, one is a 'caricature en beau' and the other a 'caricature en laid'.[12] In fact, Mariette is rather dismissive of Carracci because he suggests that his only goal was humour whereas Leonardo was engaged in a more noble pursuit, the study of the passions. Caylus chiefly admired Leonardo for his subtle depiction of the moderate passions which, we shall see, were central to his *concours*.

Caylus's attitude to facial expression, and in particular his interpretation of Le Brun, is most aptly summed up in his discussion of Carle Van Loo's rendering of Agamemnon's grief at the sacrifice of Iphigenia, published in 1757. Caylus particularly admires the explicitness of the artist's depiction: 'L'Artiste n'a rien caché de sa douleur; elle est empreinte sur tous les traits de son visage; on lit dans ses yeux tout l'abbatement de son ame'.[13] The significance of Van Loo's composition was that it flouted a convention based on an anecdote about the Classical painter Timanthes. The artist was said to be in such despair over how to depict Agamemnon's complex emotion that he resorted to painting the figure with his face concealed in his robe, a gesture which was subsequently hailed as a marvel of eloquence. Van Loo, on the other hand, portrayed Agamemnon's face fully uncovered so that nothing of its expressive qualities should be lost.

Caylus expresses his dissatisfaction with the device of masking the face and his endorsement of Van Loo's solution:

> Malgré le respect que j'ai pour l'Antiquité, je ne louerai point Timante d'avoir voilé le visage d'Agamemnon [...] Ce procédé, si vanté par les Orateurs & par les Poëtes, & dont l'application peut être en effet fort utile à 'l'Eloquence & à la Poësie, me paraît dans la Peinture un contresens, & si j'ose dire, une absurdité. Chaque passion a son expression & son langage; mais les nuances en sont infinies, & ces nuances qui la plûpart sont inaccessibles à l'Eloquence & à la Poësie, parce que les langues sont plus propres à exprimer les vûes de l'esprit, qu'à rendre les mouvements de l'ame, ont dans la Peinture des ressources & des moyens qu'aucun artiste ne pourra jamais épuiser (pp. 25-7).

His point is that the face is a unique visual medium for rendering the movements of the soul and that it needs to be given maximum visibility in order to display all the nuances of the passions. Moreover, he claims, the artist

can never exhaust the expressive potential of the human face. He suggests here that painting can depict the nuances of passion more effectively than poetry which is more suited to the abstract workings of the mind, and that it is therefore absurd to mask the passions in painting. In fact, Caylus later struggles to redeem antiquity by reinterpreting the Timanthes anecdote, claiming that the concealed face of Agamemnon actually obeys the rules of *costume* by being faithful to Euripides' version of the event.

But there is an important sub-text to this discussion. Le Brun, in his own *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* as well as in his *Sacrifice of Jephtha's Daughter*, had also worked against tradition in revealing rather than concealing the faces of his protagonists. Van Loo was therefore consciously working in the spirit of Le Brun, and Caylus was consciously endorsing what he saw to be a Le Brunian principle, namely the maximisation of facial expression. But in reality there is a vast difference between Le Brun and Caylus on this point. Paradoxically, Le Brun maximises facial expression through minimalism, through the stripping of detail in order to focus on the most salient characteristics. Caylus, on the other hand, conceives of the maximisation of expression as the artist's attempt to be all-encompassing, to express every nuance of the passions through every technical means at his disposal. Caylus hangs on to the Le Brunian notion of clarity and yet his subscription to a contemporary aesthetic of diversity and nuance poses insuperable problems for the conveying of visual information, all the more so since the arena of signification is confined to the face alone. His ideal of facial expression translates into a rather different actuality.

An Elusive Naturalism

The conditions of the *concours* are set out in a lecture, 'De l'Etude de la tête en particulier', held on 6 October 1759. This is a reworking of a previous lecture on 'L'Etude des têtes' held in 1753, in which Caylus unsuccessfully proposed the idea of a *concours*. He begins by foregrounding the head and the face in artistic representation:

> La position de la tête et le caractere du visage sont les parties dominantes de la nature de l'homme, elles doivent par consequent etre le principal objet des arts, dont le but est l'imitation. L'Expression du visage est en effet le tableau de toutes les passions et de tous les sentimens dont l'homme est affecté; les nüances de ses mouvemens, quelque fois delicates et pour ainsi dire imperceptibles, sont une augmentation de raison pour se mettre en état de les sentir et de les saisir par une étude profonde et repettée. Cette obligation est d'autant plus nécessaire que le visage porte non seulement le caractere de toutes les passions de l'ame, comme je l'ai déjà dit, mais de tous les mouvemens du corps, et que son Expression prévient le Spectateur, attire l'oeil et le fixe; elle fait plus, elle parle à l'Esprit avec un si grand Empire, qu'elle est capable de faire des illusions et de suppléer en reparant pour ainsi dire les mouvemens d'un corps representé avec trop peu de justesse et de précision; tant il est vrai que cette belle partie du corps indique et constate la verité de toutes les actions.[14]

This passage contains the typical elements of contemporary discourse on expression: the traditional topos of expression as a language speaking not just to the eyes but also to the soul; the face and head as a summation of man, the meeting point of both body and soul. The emphasis on the nuances of facial movement recalls Watelet's theories, as does the imperative to select the passions through precise observations of nature. Moreover, the face's flexibility is suggested and its capacity to represent all the passions simultaneously. But Caylus also suggests something new: the face can act as a corrective factor for a badly drawn body, and the spectator's eye will compensate for the deficiencies in figure-drawing. By implication, the face is representative of a greater truth than the body.

Whilst teaching practices in the Académie varied between stringency and laxness depending on the prevailing regime, the principles of its teaching programme remained essentially unchanged between the Académie's inception and the Revolution.[15] As seen in Chapter 2, artists began their training with a lengthy process of copying from drawing manuals and recommended works. It was only after all this that they were allowed to proceed to the life class, the pinnacle of academic training, for the drawing of the *académie* or full-length male nude. Considered to have trained their minds as much as their hands by this process, artists were finally deemed ready for the vagaries of nature.[16] For Caylus, though he does not state this explicitly, the problem of the *académie* was that not enough attention was given to the face. The model was frequently placed far away from the artist, so that the face was likely to be distant, in shadow, or even turned away. In this way, the body could be perfectly drawn but the face would remain an approximation. Effectively, Caylus argues for the life class to be brought one stage earlier in the training process.

'De l'etude de la tête en particulier' continues with a lament at the neglect of the head in the Académie: 'Il est donc étonnant que les études établies dans l'école française par la magnificence de nos rois, réunissant toutes parties nécessaires pour le progrès et la solide instruction de vos arts, permettent de regretter l'étude des têtes'. This remark seems almost bizarre considering the proliferation of drawing books of heads by Le Brun and Raphael in the eighteenth century, and the frequent instruction to artists to copy heads from the paintings of Poussin and Le Sueur. But it is the neglect of drawing from life that Caylus is bemoaning.

Caylus credits Le Brun with attempting to remedy the lack of attention given to heads, but he also has reservations:

Le Brun a senti la nécessité d'une pareille étude, il a voulu suppléer à son deffaut par les traits des passions et des caractères héroiques qu'il a fait graver. C'est un médiocre secours: et vous scavés MM, de quelle utilité peuvent être ces traits; et quand ils ne seroient pas aussi fortement soumis à une maniere, que sont-ils en comparaison de la nature?

Here Le Brun's abstract line drawings are set against the ideal of observation from nature. Caylus's other criticisms of Le Brun are typical of his age: his passions are viewed as 'héroiques', in other words, noble and strong, verging on the extreme and encouraging manner in those who copy them.

The observational approach is promoted in Caylus's stipulations for the *concours*.[17] Besides the use of a live model, Caylus indicates that the head should be life-size, unlike Le Brun's drawings or their engravings which are considerably smaller than life.[18] He also states that drawings should be enhanced through the use of colour, shading and brushstrokes. This point was stressed by Dandré-Bardon, the academician who organised the *concours* in its early years and whose duties included choosing the passions to be represented and posing the model. His *Traité de Peinture* (1765) may in many ways be read as a summation of the ideals of the *concours*. It is also the expanded version of a speech he made in 1759 on the subject of the new *concours*.[19] Dandré-Bardon expands the vocabulary of the passions so as to render their nuance and multiplicity. Whereas Le Brun had considered that expression was maximised through a finite structure of purely linear symbols, Dandré-Bardon suggests that a range of attributes contribute to a head's expressivity. In the *Traité de peinture*, he lists five aspects: first, the 'bel ensemble' or proportion of the head; second, the lines of the different passions which sketch themselves on the face; third, colour; fourth, *chiaroscuro*, and lastly, brushwork, or the artist's *faire*.

In fact, Dandré-Bardon suggests that it is the last three of these which are the most important in conveying expression. This is put most succinctly in his 'Discours sur l'expression relative au nouveau concours':

> Le Dessinateur ajoûte aux traits et aux formes, qui presentent le corps de l'Expression, les nuances de couleur et de clair-obscur qui lui donnent l'esprit et l'ame [...] Par nuances nous entendons tout cequi est capable de colorer, d'animer la Passion; Ce qui comprend la couleur, le clair obscur et les toûches (p. 297).

This conception could not be further from Le Brun's promotion of *dessin*: for Dandré-Bardon, line is merely the 'body' of a painting, whereas colour, *chiaroscuro* and brushstrokes provide its spiritual qualities.

This maximisation of the vocabulary of the passions is borne out in the entries for the *concours* which use a variety of materials and techniques. Eight of the prize-winning drawings are currently preserved at the Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The drawings are executed with up to three colours, a mixture of black and white chalk and *sanguine*, which creates a sense of space and movement, and highlights certain areas of the drawing. In contrast, Le Brun's drawings use only black chalk and ink. David's 1773 entry, *La Douleur* (Plate 8b), uses blue as well as red highlights, and Jean-Pierre de St Ours's entry for 1774 depicting *Le Mépris* is done in pastel. In several years,

the prize was also won by sculptors. Thus the *concours* gives a sense not only of the variety of nature, but also of the various means at the artist's disposal for depicting that variety. The key is to maximise expression through the explicit representation of emotions, but also through the tools and techniques at the artist's disposal.

Thus far Caylus seems to distance himself from Le Brun. But despite appearances, the *concours* is still dependent on a Le Brunian *a priori* approach to the passions. As Caylus explains in 'De l'étude de la tête en particulier', the assignment is to depict a predetermined *named* passion, selected by the teacher in charge. The passions chosen for each year's *concours* should form a succession so young artists can gradually build up a portfolio of useful passions. It is almost as if Caylus were reinventing the Le Brunian portfolio. At the start of each *concours*, the teacher would explain to the pupils the nature of the passion to be represented, taking care to differentiate it from other closely related passions. In this sense the event is less dependent on pure observation than on focusing on the idea of a passion, created through verbal means. It involves starting from an idea and finding the appropriate facial expressions, in other words moving from the inside out. The *concours* is therefore deductive despite itself.

Whilst Caylus does not insist on schemas of passions along Cartesian lines or those listed in rhetorical treatises, he nevertheless envisages a system which is grounded in language, dependent on a labelling process. The verbal prerogative was maintained with the insertion of the head into narrative. The teacher was given one month's preparation time during which he would tell his model stories and thereby inspire the requisite passion in her. Moreover, on the day of the *concours* he would explain to the pupils the nature of the passion by making it the subject of history painting: 'c'est Didon mourante sur le bucher, c'est Venus pleurante la mort d'Adonis &c.'. It appears that, rather as Watelet's aesthetic resorts to verbal descriptions in the absence of suitable models in nature, Caylus's 'natural' subject needs to be enhanced through verbal descriptions. This setting would be further enhanced by subtle use of clothing and headgear such as Greek helmets, the latter being the usual trappings of the Académie's life class. The model's task, therefore, was one of role-play, and unsurprisingly, it is likely that actresses were used as models for the *concours*.[20] Caylus appears to borrow from prevailing acting theories in that he seeks to create the conditions so that the model can actually feel the selected passion rather than just simulating it. (Diderot and others were of course arguing against this method at the time.)

It is clear that many things militated against Caylus's observational approach. The studio setting meant that passions were not collected 'on the streets' but in an artificial environment. The announcement of the chosen

passion as late as the beginning of the *concours* actually prevented the artist from making preparatory sketches. Moreover, the task imposed on the model was an exacting one, for passions simulated over a three-hour time-span inevitably acquired the fixity of a grimace. As an academic exercise, therefore, the *concours* fell into the traps which it sought to avoid, namely stasis, artificiality and manner. In other words, the problems associated with copying Le Brun had merely been replicated.

Critics were quick to point out that the *concours* worked against the study of nature. Grimm, writing in the *Correspondance littéraire* in 1760, complains that French painting is already prone to affectation and falseness: 'Nos peintres croient avoir mis beaucoup de chaleur dans leurs tableaux quand ils en ont bien contourné toutes les figures, bien forcé et contrasté toutes les attitudes; mais ce n'est pas ainsi qu'exprime la nature, ni ceux qui suivent ses traces', and he argues that the Prix Caylus merely exacerbates this defect.[21] Besides this, a drawing by Cochin which represents the 1761 *concours*, gives a curious view of its staging (Plate 10a).[22] The model, depicting *La Douceur*, wears a crown of laurels and sits on a dais, facing the light. She is surrounded by young male artists who are close enough to observe her features. Behind her, Caylus looks on. To his right is Vassé, the teacher in charge of that year's *concours*, and to his left is Restout, the Director of the Académie. In the background is the 'salle ordinaire du modèle' in the Louvre, its walls cluttered with paintings. What is striking about the drawing is the frozen attitudes of all the figures. The model herself looks bored rather than impassioned and the three academicians are anything but involved in the proceedings: Caylus looks sternly into the middle distance, Restout is absorbed in his own thoughts and Vassé seems distracted by something out of view. Meanwhile the students in somewhat constrained fashion copy the model.

Whether or not it is representative of actuality, the drawing hardly reads as a celebration of the *concours*. In portraying the event as a dull academic exercise, Cochin manages to be subtly critical of a man whom he disliked and disagreed with on aesthetic and institutional matters, but at the same time without betraying his own academic status. Cochin's drawing was exhibited in the Salon of 1767 and drew the comment from Diderot: 'L'école n'a pas un pouce de profondeur'.[23] It is likely that his comment refers to the subject, the 'Prix d'expression' itself, as much as to its rendering, since Diderot, as we have seen, had no enthusiasm for stiff academic poses.

In practice, it was clear to even the supporters of the *concours* that certain procedures were unsatisfactory. In 1776 Cochin, in his capacity as Secretary of the Académie, proposed some changes in his *Propositions et Reflexions concernantes le prix fondé par Monsieur le Comte de Caylus, pour l'étude des têtes, et de l'expression*.[24] He attempted to de-theatricalise the *concours*, by

suggesting that it was held three times a year instead of once, that the artists themselves chose the model from their family or circle of friends and that they practised by making repeated sketches from life before taking part in the *concours*. Ironically, Caylus had rejected the last proposal on the grounds that it would encourage manner.

THE MODERATE PASSIONS

The mild passions, or *passions douces*, were the focus of the *concours*. Caylus explains in *Sur la manière* that these are 'Le sublime de la peinture et comme la plus difficile de toutes ses parties' (p. 178), hence the need for artists to practise them. This is reminiscent of Watelet's emphasis on the nuances and subtle distinctions between the passions. The passions selected in its early years reflect this muted tone: *L'Affliction* (1760); *La Douceur* (1761); *La Gaité* (1762) (Plate 9a); *La Compassion* (1763) (Plate 9b); *L'Attention* (1764). In this respect, Caylus identifies more strongly with Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Le Sueur, who were known for their graceful and subtle 'female' renderings of the human passions, than with Le Brun who was thought to favour the more 'male' heroic passions. In *Sur la manière*, Caylus upholds these three artists as paragons of expressivity, without once mentioning Le Brun.

Caylus's thinking on this subject is similar to that of Dandré-Bardon. The latter divides the passions into four categories: 'tranquilles', 'agréables', 'tristes et douloureuses' and 'violentes et terribles'. This categorisation is derived from Le Brun's principles of facial movement rather than his division of the passions into simple and mixed: the 'passions agréables' elevate the facial features towards the brain and the imagination whereas the 'passions violentes et terribles' lower them towards the heart and the body. Conversely, tranquil and sad passions involve little facial movement. Generally the moderate passions are promoted by Dandré-Bardon rather than the heroic or extreme passions and the emphasis is on slight and subtle facial movements. The word 'nuance' again comes to the fore.

Caylus's aim is to capture the difficult middle ground which is as far removed from extremes and caricature as possible, as he states in 'De l'étude de la tête en particulier': 'Tout ce qui est chargé ne convient point au projet dont il est question'. Strong passions, he suggests, are much easier to depict because of their boldness and extremity, and furthermore, if they stray over into caricature it is more excusable. But there is another reason for this cultivation of the middle ground: the *concours* aims to represent the passions which are found in real life, whereas the more extreme passions, the 'caractères héroiques', are considered to be chiefly a product of the artist's imagination. He suggests that artists can infer the nature of 'les caracteres feroces' through contrary example, through descriptions of candour and

serenity. There are important parallels between Caylus's view of the passions and contemporary distinctions between comedy and tragedy in the theatre, and these will be explored in Chapter 7.

This interest in the median zone, which can only be conquered by attending to the minutiae of nature, leads Caylus to prefer a certain type of model. He deems that a female model is better suited to the repertoire of the softer passions, though he does not explore the issue of whether women are naturally prone to such passions, or whether their modesty is grounded in social convention. In practice a female model was nearly always chosen for the *concours*, the first male model not appearing until 1772. Caylus's introduction of a female model into the Académie should in some ways be seen as progressive. The life class had always been an all-male affair: though there were a handful of women members of the Académie, they were banned from this particular class ostensibly on the grounds of decency, although this naturally also barred them from accession to the height of Academic achievement, history painting.[25] In any case the Académie would not countenance a female model posing nude, and so artists had to rely on private arrangements.[26] Caylus's proposal was apparently very decent: the model, it was stipulated, was to be of good moral character, and would remain fully clothed. But there is a disquieting mixture of theatricalisation and subtly prurient intrusion into the private sentiments of the woman. That the sexual atmosphere did not go unnoticed at the time is clear from the highly charged vocabulary of the author of the *Observations en réponse à celles de Mr. Cochin relativement au prix d'expression*, who speaks of 'la liberté de prendre le modele sous l'aspect qui leur paroit le plus piquant et celle d'en jouir de plus près et de "saisir" les ondulations favorables selon les traits du visage qui echape de tous'.[27] Prize-winning drawings, such as Michel-Honoré Bounieu's *La Gaité* from 1762, reflect this delicate but pervasive eroticism (Plate 9a). In the light of all this, it is perhaps unsurprising that finding suitable models rapidly became problematic.

Caylus's choice of model is also influenced by his conception of character. He subscribes to three contemporary theories of character, which sometimes seem contradictory. Firstly, like Buffon and many others, he argues that character is built up from passion in a progressive accumulation of traits gained through experience of life. He states in 'De l'etude de la tête en particulier' that young artists 'Seroient convaincus par l'experience que l'impression des passions habituelles laisse des traces sur le visage, et que leur répétition forme des plis qui se joignant à quelques autres traits, plus ou moins marqués, produisent non seulement ce qu'on appelle la phisionomie, mais indiquent le caractere general et dominant', and in *Sur la manière* he admires Leonardo for his sensitivity to the effects of repeated passions. His second

suggestion resembles that of Bougeant, namely that there is little difference between character and passions. At the beginning of 'De l'étude de la tête en particulier', he states: 'Je desirerois que l'on posât dans l'Académie une tête de passion ou de caractére' without going on to make any distinction between the two. One might expect the *tête de caractère* to veer slightly closer to caricature, exaggerating noses and chins, or perhaps involving specific individuation akin to portraiture. It might also imply a greater realism or closeness to nature. In contrast, the *tête d'expression* would seem to evoke more ideal forms, or a more transient, passing emotion. But the implication of Caylus's words is that there is little, if any, difference between character and passions. The fact that they are concerned with nuances and subtle distinctions makes them indistinguishable from one another.

But paradoxically, the *concours* also seeks to avoid character. It aims to seize the passion at the peak of its freshness, before it becomes dulled through repetition and turns into an unbecoming character. For this reason, Caylus insists upon models who are as free from character as possible. He opts for young people, and preferably females because their faces are not yet blemished by their experience of life. Likewise, Caylus dispenses with beards and marks such as scars. In this sense his work comes close to that of Le Brun, which also does not concern itself with the variations on a particular passion caused by differences in character. This theory, which might loosely be termed 'neo-classical', envisages character as that which departs from a norm. This can be visualised in terms of a linear scale: at the centre is ideal beauty, and the further one departs from this centre, the more 'character' is acquired until one reaches the realms of caricature. This implies a journey from perfection to imperfection, with character being understood as a distortion or defect.[28] Caylus focuses on the mid-point on the scale because this is the most perfect and beautiful region.

In his emphasis on the moderate passions, Caylus is probably influenced by the distinction between *ethos* and *pathos* which was first made by Aristotle in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, and developed by Quintilian, and which was a source over the ages for many theorists of drama, literature and art.[29] Quintilian, speaking in the context of how the orator should arouse emotion in his audience, describes two different types of passion: 'In the one case [*pathos*], the passions are violent, in the other [*ethos*] subdued, the former command and disturb, the latter persuade and induce a feeling of goodwill'.[30] Aristotle had suggested that *pathos* encompasses the fleeting passions whereas *ethos* involves the more permanent characteristics. Quintilian argues that this may sometimes be so, but not always. He goes on to suggest that the difference is sometimes one of degree rather than nature so that, for example, love is associated with *pathos*, whereas its less extreme version, affection, is

associated with *ethos*. Caylus's emphasis is clearly on *ethos*, on the softer passions, whereas Le Brun's passions by implication are associated with *pathos*, with grand tragic extremes. One sees the blurring of character and passion in the concept of *ethos*, for it is traditionally associated with more permanent human characteristics, but also with the passions. This is why Caylus manages to smooth over the differences between them. Finally, the moral overtones of *ethos* are present in the *concours*: Caylus insists that the model should be of good character, the implication being that a person of dubious moral standing could not adequately represent these moral passions.

The problem with Caylus's representations of the moderate passions is that they are visually indeterminate. It is very difficult to tell from the finished entries exactly which passion is being represented, and even when one knows which is the chosen passion, the results do not always seem to correspond. Bounieu's 1761 drawing, *La Gaité*, for example, could represent any number of passions besides gaity: serenity, wistfulness, regret and so on. Of course, this might be attibuted to sociological factors: a modern beholder may be used to a set of very different facial expressions from those which were current in eighteenth-century France. In other words, our 'reading' of the emotions of the past may be subject to infinite distortion due to historical and cultural changes in the ways that the emotions are expressed. If this is so, then the entries for the Prix Caylus, precisely because of their subtle delineations, could be particularly valuable to us in our attempt to reconstruct the emotional codes and postures of a particular period. But, if one discounts these tantalising sociological issues, the problem remains that there is very little tangible difference between these moderate passions. Cochin's depiction of the bored model at the Académie sitting underlines forcibly and ironically just how easily such passions can slide into one another.

Earlier in his career, Caylus seems to have recognised the difficulty of pursuing the nuances of the passions. In the manuscript 'Les Passions en peinture', which is probably a draft version of a lecture which was never delivered, he maintains that, as regards the passions, art cannot imitate nature in all its diversity, commenting: 'Les nuances sont à l'infini dans la nature, mais cet infini est très barré pour le peintre'.[31] He recognises that a particularly streamlined approach is necessary and that a shorthand of the passions must be the painter's solution:

> Les passions par rapport à la peinture ne consistent que dans quelques parties, qu'elle peut saisir et qu'elle est capable d'exprimer car l'abondance de la langue seroit plutot un obstacle qu'un secours. Le spectateur mis en etat de lire une abbreviation, c'est ainsi qu'il acheve le plus grand nombre des passions du peintre et qu'il donne le veritable caractere de cette nuance que le peintre ne peut depasser (p. 366).

This vocabulary of abbreviation recalls Le Brun's minimalist approach. Caylus suggests here that variety in nature is incompatible with clear artistic messages and therefore that some form of compromise is necessary. But the tendency of his *concours* is towards rather than away from these elusive nuances. I suggested above in my discussion of Watelet that a characteristic of mid-eighteenth century aesthetics was a focus on what a passion is *not* rather than what it *is*, and an emphasis on the continuum, or the transition between the passions rather than on the qualities of each individual passion. Despite this, Caylus persists in seeing the passions as distinct named entities. The fact that the distinctions are practically indistinguishable results in a loss of meaning. This is compounded by the fact that the naming process slows the passions down until they are static and no longer fluid.

THE APPEAL OF STRONG PASSIONS

Amongst other pitfalls, one should ask whether the Prix Caylus came too late. In the 1760s, artists and theorists were beginning to question the purpose of the representation of the passions and even suggesting that a neutral countenance was more expressive than an impassioned one. In his 1760 *compte rendu* of the Prix Caylus, Grimm argues that the passions have a disfiguring effect upon the face:

> La passion décompose et change les traits; elle sort toutes les figures de leur position naturelle; mais avant d'étudier l'effet de telle passion sur la figure humaine, il faut la bien connaître quand elle est tranquille, sans quoi il n'est pas possible de donner à la passion son caractère, et, au lieu de la sublimité qu'elle exige, on tombe dans le maniéré, dans le compassé et dans tous les écueils de la médiocrité.[32]

He argues that it is better for the artist to master the face at rest before tackling the passions because they can so easily lead to falsity and manner.

The case for a neutral countenance was most strongly put by Winckelmann. His *Histoire de l'art chez les anciens* (1766), which was originally published in German in 1764, is unequivocal in its criticism of modern artists. Winckelmann contrasts the 'sage discrétion' of Ancient artists with the work of the moderns 'qui n'ont pas exprimé beaucoup avec peu, mais qui au contraire ont employé beaucoup de signes pour indiquer peu de choses'.[33] Here Winckelmann identifies the straining for explicitness which is so evident in the work of Caylus, and he suggests that the passions may be conveyed more effectively by other more indirect means. Winckelmann compares modern depictions of the passions to the masks used in vast Ancient theatres which exaggerated the emotions in order to transmit them to a distant audience. His comparison is not a favourable one, however, for it is the forced, even distorted, nature of these representations to which he draws attention. Le

Brun's treatise, he claims, is available everywhere but it is a poor model for it can only teach through extremes.

Winckelmann identifies in Greek art a quality of restraint in facial expression which makes it all the more beautiful. Yet there is a vast difference between Caylus's 'passions douces' and Winckelmann's vision of 'stille Größe'. The latter's view is dominated by stoicism, by the intense paradox of strong, 'noble' passions which are felt but heroically controlled. Thus Winckelmann is acutely aware that more can be conveyed by suggestion than by a more literal rendering. He cites a number of Classical examples where artists have depicted the moment after the greatest passion because this is more eloquent: Timomachus's *Ajax*; the statue of Philostratus at the Capitol. Above all, he sees the *Laocoön* as a masterpiece of stoic restraint, revealing the most extreme human passions yet equally the superhuman attempt to transcend these passions.

In France these tenets were most famously adopted by David and his school. It is interesting that David, who won the Prix Caylus in 1773, and did several studies of 'vestales' and women in a state of rapture, later sought to distance himself from this particular brand of expression. According to his pupil and biographer Délécluze, David claimed that he used merely to pander to contemporary tastes: 'Je l'assaisonnais à la sauce moderne, comme je disais dans ces temps-là. Je fonçais tant soit peu le sourcil, je relevais les pommettes, j'ouvrais légèrement la bouche, enfin je lui donnais ce que les modernes appellent de l'expression, et ce qu'aujourd'hui j'appelle la grimace'.[34] This description makes the Prix Caylus and all it stood for sound like the last gasp of the Rococo, instead of a concerted attempt to move beyond it. Whether or not David was really so sceptical in his early career is uncertain, but in his work there is certainly a dramatic shift away from the literalness of Caylus's approach. In many of David's mature works, the faces are hidden. Brutus's face is concealed by a deep shadow. The men's faces in the *Oath of the Horatii* are stark profiles, whilst the grief of the female figures is suggested through their veiled faces and drooping postures. David's painting, in its return to the tradition of Timanthes, marks a clear break with the teaching of Le Brun which had dominated French art for more than a hundred years.

Winckelmann's theories coincided with, or indeed triggered, a revival of interest in the strong passions. Many, and Diderot among them, saw in antiquity something large-scale, grand and morally uplifting in comparison with the 'petite manière' which had dominated French art for decades. Lessing saw the expressions of antiquity differently from Winckelmann: instead of a stoic restraint, he saw Classical heroes as human beings subject to various emotions, and he shifted the discussion to a consideration of how painting, more direct than poetry, could represent strong passions without ugliness or

distortion.[35] In contrast to Lessing, the interest in the strong passions also developed into a fascination with extreme and distorted facial expressions. The Austrian sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt carved around fifty heads in stone or wood, all depicting distorted expressions, yawns, sneezes and some more alarming expressions of physical pain and pathological disturbance.[36] The painter Joseph Ducreux, a pupil of La Tour, produced a series of self-portraits with contorted faces, laughing or yawning, in the 1780s and '90s. Similarly, Jean-Jacques Lequeu did a series of drawings of facial contortions, an exaggerated wink, a tongue pulled out at the viewer.[37] This experiment with extreme facial expression, which is also found in Rembrandt, eventually developed into an obsession with the physiognomy of the deviant, the madman and the criminal which dominated nineteenth-century physiognomical thought.[38]

Caylus's *concours* is therefore representative of the paradoxes and inconsistencies of contemporary theories of expression, most notably the attempt to move away from and beyond Le Brun, but the simultaneous inability to do so. As an exercise it failed on three counts. Firstly, the meaning of the image was lost through an attempt to accommodate the current discourse of nuance and variety, and in the focus on the indistinguishable moderate passions. Secondly, the *concours* was static and artificial in all respects, from the staged nature of the event itself to the tied-down passions which were grounded in a Le Brunian labelling process. Above all the *concours* tried too hard in its pursuit of maximum expression: not only did it misread Le Brun, it also left nothing to the artist's or the beholder's imagination. To misquote Winckelmann, the Prix Caylus said too little by trying to say too much.

NOTES

1. *L'Expression des passions: Ausdruck als Darstellungsproblem in der französischen Kunst und Kunsttheorie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1991), chapter 7.
2. The definitive biography is still Samuel Rocheblave's *Essai sur le Comte de Caylus* (Paris: Hachette, 1889).
3. Caylus is presented unfavourably by Christian Michel, who is clearly more partial to his rival Cochin: *Charles-Nicolas Cochin et l'art des Lumières* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1993); Jean Locquin depicts Caylus as a singularly unoriginal figure. *La Peinture d'histoire en France de 1747 à 1785* (Paris: 1912; repr. Paris: Jacques Lonore CLT, 1978).
4. The aesthetic and institutional reforms of 1747 are detailed by Locquin; Thomas Crow highlights their socio-political aspect: *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985).
5. See Crow, p. 126.
6. 'Vie d'Antoine Watteau', in *Vies d'artistes du XVIIIe siècle,* ed. by André Fontaine (Paris: Renouard, 1910), pp. 1-22 (p. 18). This was read to the Académie in 1748.
7. 'Sur la manière et les moyens de l'éviter', in *Vies d'artistes*, pp. 175-182 (p. 177). Winckelmann reaches a different conclusion, highlighting the lack of facial expressivity in Greek sculpture as positively enhancing its tranquil nobility. This leads him to warn against excessive facial expression in modern painting. *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, trans. by Henry Fuseli (London, 1765; repr. Menston, Yorks: Scholar Press 1972), p. 33.

8. *Recueil de 300 têtes et sujets de composition Gravés par Mr. Le Comte de Caylus d'aprés les pierres gravées antiques du Cabinet du Roi* (Paris, n.d.). A manuscript note in the volume in the Bibliothèque Nationale suggests that the drawings are by Charles-Antoine Coypel and De Troy and that the plates were kept by Mariette. In fact more than a third of the engravings are emblems rather than heads.
9. See Michael Kwakkelstein, *Leonardo Da Vinci as a Physiognomist: Theory and Drawing Practice* (Leiden: Primavera Press, 1994).
10. Caylus's engravings are from a set of caricature heads belonging to Mariette. The latter's father had acquired them in the belief that they were originals, but in fact the drawings were copies. See Kate Steinitz, *Pierre-Jean Mariette and Le Comte de Caylus and their Concept of Leonardo da Vinci in the Eighteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Zeitlin and Ver Brugge, 1984), p. 8.
11. The preface is reprinted in Mariette, *Abécédario*, ed. by P. de Chennevières and A. de Montaiglon, 6 vols (Paris,1851-60) [*Archives de l'art français*], III, 139-64.
12. *Salon de 1767* (III, 170).
13. *Description d'un tableau représentant le Sacrifice d'Iphigénie peint par M. Carle Van Loo* (Paris, 1757), p. 16.
14. 'De l'étude de la tête en particulier', Paris, Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, MS 522.
15. Reed Benhamou describes as 'haphazard' the training before 1748, after which lectures on history and theory became compulsory. She also contrasts the 'confusion' related in the minutes of academic meetings with the idealised portrayals of drawing classes by Testelin and Cochin. 'Public and Private Art Education in France 1648-1793', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 308 (1993), 54-74.
16. See Marianne Roland-Michel, *Le Dessin français au dix-huitième siècle* (Fribourg: Office du livre, 1987); James Henry Rubin, *Eighteenth Century Life Drawing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).
17. In Le Brun's day an observational approach was categorically rejected. Gérard Van Obstal's lecture, *La Figure principale du groupe de Laocoön*, of 2 July 1667 (reproduced in: *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, ed. by Henri Jouin (Paris: A. Quentin, 1883), pp. 19-27), argues that drawing from life would be far too difficult because of the rapidity of emotions and that the artist should rely all the more on Antique models, especially the Laocoön. This statue was traditionally the focus of speculation on the portrayal of the emotions as it seemed to have achieved a perfect synthesis of beauty, pain and fear.
18. This implicit criticism of the size of Le Brun's heads is made explicit by Sulzer : 'Il eût été à souhaiter [...] que le Brun eût fait graver de grandeur naturelle, les *caracteres* des passions'. Article 'Caractère', *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie* V (1776), 230. Le Clerc's heads are little more than 5 x 3½ cm, and Picart's are even smaller, though the original drawings are roughly twice this size. Audran's *petit folio* edition of 1727 reveals a move towards naturalism: the heads are two thirds of life-size and the stark linear quality of the original drawings is softened by shading and modelling, though the eyebrows are exaggeratedly dark. The heads also have a much more flesh-like quality.
19. 'Discours sur l'expression relative au nouveau concours, lû dans l'assemblée de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de sculpture le 1er dec 1759', Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, 13801.
20. Kirchner, p. 215.
21. 'Sur le prix fondé à l'Académie de Peinture par le Comte de Caylus' (15 décembre 1760), in *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (Paris, 1877-82), IV, 324-25 (p. 324). Kirchner and Montgomery Wilson wrongly attribute this to Diderot.
22. See Emile Dacier, 'A propos d'un dessin de Cochin: Le Concours pour le Prix d'expression', *Bulletin de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts*, (1928), 152-66. Another drawing by Cochin, very similar to the first, is held at the Musée Carnavalet. Dacier claims that a third drawing, now in a private collection, also represents the 1761 *concours* but doubts that it is by Cochin. Kirchner (p. 215) refutes this and suggests that it might represent the unsuccessful 1759 *concours*.
23. III, 332.
24. Transcribed in Kirchner, pp. 374-78.
25. At any one time there could be a maximum of four women members. Locquin (p. 36) argues that women were more prominent in provincial academies, especially Toulouse. He also suggests that women were prevented from attempting history painting because the vigorous nature of the passions was considered to be beyond their sensibilities.

26. Roland-Michel (p. 51) suggests that artists had plenty of occasions to draw from female models, either at private academies or at artists' gatherings.
27. Transcribed in Kirchner, pp. 378-81 (p. 381).
28. The conflation of the ideal and the norm is one of the archetypes of the neo-classical aesthetic. An interesting attempt to get beyond this conception of beauty is Alexander Cozens's *The Principles of Beauty* (London, 1778), which defines simple beauty as 'a beautiful face unmixed with character' and compound beauty 'which is beauty to which some character is annexed'.
29. An early example of this is Francesco Bocchi. See Moshe Barasch, 'Character and Physiognomy: Bocchi on Donatello's St. George. A Renaissance Text on Expression in Art', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), 413-30.
30. *The 'Institutio Oratoria' of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1921), p. 423.
31. Kirchner transcript, pp. 366-67, (p. 366).
32. *Correspondance littéraire*, IV, 324.
33. *Histoire de l'art chez les anciens*, 2 vols (Paris, 1766), I, 291.
34. Quoted in Etienne-Jean Délécluze, *Louis David: Son école et son temps* (Paris, 1855), p. 112.
35. *Laocoön*, ed. by Dorothy Reich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
36. See Ernst Kris, 'Die Charakterköpfe des Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. Versuch einer historischen und psychologischen Deutung', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, Neue Folge VI (1932), 169-228.
37. On Lequeu's work in general, see Philippe Duboy, *Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).
38. See, for example, the work of Cesare Lombroso on criminal types.

CHAPTER 6

GREUZE'S EXPRESSIVE HEADS

Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) is famous as a painter of expression. His genre paintings are seen as evocative tableaux of domestic drama which record the gamut of the human passions and which seemingly lend themselves to clear and unambiguous moral readings. In a different vein, there are his numerous studies of young girls which mingle the sentimental and the erotic, and which, superficially at least, recall aspects of the Prix Caylus. Greuze is also known for his *têtes d'expression*, even if the definition of such a type of painting is not always clear: the Martin catalogue lists numerous studies by the artist which are named after specific passions, *L'Attention*, *La Compassion*, *La Douceur*, *La Volupté* and so on, but also many indeterminate 'têtes'.[1] It is, therefore, appropriate to talk of several facets to Greuze's expressivity rather than just one.

Greuze is remarkable for his capacity to subvert and re-align a number of different expressive traditions in keeping with an agenda which is both original and strikingly modern. His work exemplifies many of the complexities in the theory of expression in the mid-eighteenth century which were identified in Chapter 3, but it also offers solutions, a way out of the impasse which Caylus's *concours* had failed to achieve. In the first part of this chapter, I examine the artist in relation to the Le Brunian tradition. The presence of Le Brun's expressive models in Greuze's painting has been commented on in the past, but usually this has been taken as evidence for the continuance of a tradition.[2] I show on the contrary that Greuze moves definitively away from Le Brun and that he points expression in a new direction, challenging Le Brun's conception of the passions and employing other means of communication with the beholder. The second part of the chapter examines the *tête d'expression*, a loosely defined and poorly understood category in French painting of this period despite Caylus's attempts to refine and institutionalise it. It also shows how Greuze's use of heads permits a fluidity between the categories of history, portrait and genre painting, and this discussion leads on to an exploration of the complex relations of similitude and difference in Greuze's work.

More than any other artist of his time, Greuze was a producer of heads. As a practising genre painter and portraitist who also tried his hand at history painting, Greuze tackled all of the 'human' genres during his career. He had a reputation for doing innumerable sketches of heads in preparation for his paintings which he soon started to exhibit in the Salons alongside his major compositions. In this respect, he follows on from Flemish painters such as

Bloemaert who drew 'tronies' or studies of heads in preparation for larger-scale history paintings. Besides this, he did numerous studies of heads in their own right, some of them portraits, others more indeterminate, and he is known particularly for his sentimental studies of childishly seductive female subjects. Greuze was not averse to reproducing the same head many times over, something which may be seen both as artistic perfectionism and as a well-seized business opportunity, for the market for Greuze's heads was a constant and flourishing one. Two books of engravings of his heads, several of them taken from his famous painting *L'Accordée de village*, appeared in the mid-1760s.[3] Towards the end of his career when his popularity had declined, his female heads were a formula upon which he increasingly relied.[4] An analysis of Greuze's heads is therefore of interest in its own right, but it is also highly appropriate in the context of this book, which draws attention to the significance of the head in eighteenth-century painting theory and practice.

Greuze and the Le Brunian Tradition

Greuze's relationship with the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture was an uneasy one, and it was marked by his ambition and his dogged individualism.[5] This has led critics to take widely differing views on the subject of his allegiances and the extent of his 'academicism'.[6] Greuze did not receive the orthodox academic training, for he began his career in Lyon, and though he enrolled for classes at the Académie on his arrival in Paris in 1750, he was apparently something of a recalcitrant pupil. His flair for genre painting and his choice of subjects of Dutch and Flemish painting meant that he did not fit the conventional mould, encouraged by the Académie, of aspiring young history painter. But the Académie was anxious to court such an evidently talented artist despite the 'low' subject matter of his art, and Marigny, the then Directeur Général des Bâtiments, arranged a trip to Rome for him and became one of Greuze's most important sponsors.

By 1765, however, relations had cooled. Greuze had still not produced the requisite *morceau de réception*, despite having obtained his *agrément* to the Académie ten years previously, and consequently he was prevented from exhibiting at the Salon of 1767. But by then he had ambitious plans to be received into the highest ranks of the Académie as a history painter, and in 1769 he famously presented his *Septime Sévère et Caracalla* (Plate 10b).[7] The attempt backfired and he was refused reception as a history painter, but was granted a position under the category of genre. This snub led to a definitive severance between artist and institution, and Greuze did not exhibit his work again at the official Salon until 1800. Greuze's contradictory position vis-à-vis the Académie — both central and marginalised — was a contributing factor in his work: he had access to tradition, but he was also free from it. Hence he was

able to borrow from established techniques and practices, but did not need to subscribe fully to them.

Greuze seems to have had few personal links with Caylus, except at the start of his career. At this point the Count may well have used his influence to recommend the young artist to Marigny. Moreover, Caylus was kept informed of the progress of the young Greuze during his stay in Italy via the letters of the Abbé Barthélémy.[8] Though it is possible that he attended some of Caylus's lectures, Greuze never took part in the Prix Caylus because he was a fully fledged artist some years before the *concours*'s inception. It is thus difficult to speak of a direct artistic dialogue between the two men, although they must have been aware of each other's aims and achievements.

Like other artists of his day, Greuze copied heads from a range of recognised and revered models. These he incorporated into his works with some ingenuity. Usually these heads were drawn from and destined for history paintings, yet in Greuze's case these heads found their way into genre scenes. In 1760 he copied the heads from Rubens's Medici sequence at the Palais de Luxembourg. The influence of Rubens's *L'Accouchement de la Reine* (Plate 6a), may be seen in his subsequent painting, *La Mère bien aimée*. Besides the obvious thematic parallel between the works, that of motherhood, there are similarities in the subjects' reclining poses and tilted heads, and in the facial expression. Diderot, commenting on a sketch of the work which was exhibited in the Salon of 1765, observed admiringly that Greuze had surpassed Rubens in the exquisite mixture of pleasure and suffering which he had conveyed in the mother's face.[9] Greuze's work, however, has a sexual piquancy which is lacking in Rubens's more stately original, and this is epitomised by the mother's open mouth with its upper row of teeth visible, which contrasts with the neatly closed lips of the French queen. Greuze's appropriation may not be parodic, but it is somewhat tongue in cheek.

Greuze is known to have copied at least twice Le Brun's illustration for *La Douleur aiguë*, which is itself derived from the *Laocoön*. This image is thought to be the basis of the young man's head in *La Malédiction paternelle* which Greuze exhibited in 1777, though it appears to have been a later addition to the work, for the preliminary sketch, shown at the Salon of 1765, reveals no evidence of this. The reference to the *Laocoön* adds substantially to the painting's subject, the perennial Greuzian theme of the father-son relationship. The statue presents a heroic yet horrific image of family bonding (father and sons are literally bound by the snakes) where the father attempts to sacrifice himself to save his sons. Conversely, Greuze's picture shows a father-son relationship gone awry, a father's wrath at his son's wilful departure. Yet despite this contrast, both works show the fathers' ultimate powerlessness over their sons' fate.

These two rather different examples show the sophistication of Greuze's borrowing of heads. In each case he is sensitive to the thematic resonances in the works so that, rather than sliding neutrally into his compositions, the heads form a striking or ironic juxtaposition with the original. The same cannot be said, however, for the artist's preparation for his *Septime Sévère et Caracalla* (Plate 10b). For this painting, Greuze tried to make up for his lack of institutional training in history painting by setting himself a strict programme including the copying of master works. He studied Poussin and, in his subsequent defence of the painting, he explained that it was particularly in his study of facial expression that he had looked to his great predecessor.[10] He also made a thorough study of antiquity, and this is reflected in the finished painting: the head of Severus is copied from an ancient sculpture in the Louvre, and the head and pose of Caracalla, as Diderot observes, are borrowed from Antinous. Yet in this painting, the copying has a literalness which is not found in his other works. This was detected by Greuze's contemporaries who found the composition to be 'froid'. In addition, the painting lacks the thematic resonances of the other works: the evocation of Antinous adds nothing to the scene itself, unlike Greuze's clever allusion to the *Laocoön* in *La Malédiction paternelle*; it seems that here Greuze simply looked to an ancient model of a young man. It is curious that the statue and its human original were renowned for the sweetness and sensitivity of their facial expression. In Greuze's painting, the face of Caracalla on the contrary suggests darkness and truculence, and hence it contradicts rather than elaborates on the original.

In fact, despite his numerous borrowings from painting and sculpture, it was as a copier of real heads that Greuze was most highly rated. This is evident in Diderot's analysis of the painter, and in particular the art critic's appraisal of *Septime Sévère*. Though Severus and Caracalla are derived from antiquity, the heads of Papinien and the senator are much more naturalistic, and this is clear from the preparatory sketches for the work (Plate 11a). I will return to the issue of the juxtaposition of these different types of heads later in the chapter. For now, it is important to note that these two 'natural' heads are the only thing which Diderot finds praiseworthy in his review of 1769, so much so that he graphically suggests that the artist should shred the canvas with his knife, but not before cutting out the heads of Papinien and the senator and taking them home to reframe (IV, 104). This comment points to Greuze's practice of exhibiting separate heads from his larger compositions and may also be a deft allusion to the artist's shrewd head for business. It would seem from Diderot's comment that Greuze is most himself when he is copying from life, and not from other artists. Diderot had already identified the artist as having a genius for capturing nature in the raw in his *Salon de 1763*:

Il [Greuze] fait des études sans fin; il n'épargne ni soins ni dépenses pour avoir les modèles qui lui conviennent. Rencontre-t-il une tête qui le frappe, il se mettrait volontiers aux genoux du porteur de cette tête pour l'attirer dans son atelier. Il est sans cesse observateur dans les rues, dans les églises, dans les marchés, dans les spectacles, dans les promenades, dans les assemblées publiques (I, 236).

A remarkably similar description in the *Salon de 1765* also evokes the wanderings of the artist by its accumulation of locations:

Nous avons trois peintres habiles, féconds et studieux observateurs de la nature, ne commençant, ne finissant rien, sans avoir appelé plusieurs fois le modèle. C'est La Grenée, Greuze et Vernet. Le second porte son talent par-tout, dans les cohues populaires, dans les églises, aux marchés, aux promenades, dans les maisons, dans les rues; sans cesse, il va recueillant des actions, des passions, des caractères, des expressions (II, 145).

The implied contrast made by Diderot is with the unfortunate students of the Académie who are prevented, due to the lengthy process of copying, from seeing nature until it is too late.[11] Diderot claims that Greuze has a privileged access to the passions and characters of ordinary people and there is a strong suggestion in this passage that expression does not have to be aristocratic but may be observed in a more genuine and raw state amongst working folk. Watelet had argued the same thing much more forcibly in *L'Art de peindre*, although he had despaired of the artist ever finding such unmasked passions in a modern urban environment. Thus Greuze in this description epitomises the contemporisation and the democratisation of the passions, the realisation of what Watelet thought to be impossible.

In fact these descriptions, though overtly stressing Greuze's freshness and originality, also point to his position within yet another tradition, that of Leonardo da Vinci. Leonardo, we have seen, was mythologised as the quintessential 'empirical' artist, going out into the world and making endless studies from nature, and also as the true student of the characters and passions of man, compiling and keeping catalogues of heads in his studio. Caylus had championed Leonardo because of these qualities, but in reality his *concours* precluded such realism. Greuze, the modern-day Leonardo, therefore fulfils the aspiration to which Caylus aspired but did not himself realise through his *concours*, that of copying directly from nature.

In the light of Greuze's 'realism', it is ironic that he himself became canonical, and became part of the régime of copying. A collection of Greuze's work, containing many of his heads, was sent during his lifetime to the newly formed Academy at St Petersburg to assist artists with their training.[12] Other French artists were also inspired by his heads, among them Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, who relates in her memoirs how she used to copy Greuze's female heads when young, along with heads by Rubens and Van Dyck. She particularly valued Greuze's ability to render the half-tones of the female complexion.[13]

FROM PASSION TO MOOD

It is commonly assumed that Greuze's work employs a repertoire of universally identifiable gestures and facial expressions. In this respect he could be seen as following on from Le Brun. This impression is enhanced by Diderot's praise for what he sees as Greuze's narrative clarity and expressive logic: 'Chacune [des figures] est à sa place et fait ce qu'elle doit' (II, 141). But in fact, the legibility and transparency of Greuze's facial expressions is not as absolute as it seems. Mark Ledbury has identified in *La Lecture de la Bible*, where a father reads aloud to his family, a counter-narrative of boredom, furtiveness and fear on the faces of the listeners and even a hint of reproachfulness in the father which together reverse the overt scenario of family cohesion.[14] One could continue this investigation by seeing a sadness, almost a listlessness in *L'Accordée de village*, despite the supposedly joyful occasion, a mood which belies the work's pretty, almost Rococo colouring and its playful serpentine contours.[15] This impression contributes to a rather different moral reading, that of the woes of marriage. In this context, the face of the bride seems to reflect not coyness and modesty but an almost dogged reluctance to undergo the ceremony, whilst her groom's bowed head and blank expression could be seen to emit a sense of dread at the thought of his future life. Moreover, their bodies, both entwined and leaning away from each other, express a complex mixture of intimacy and distance.

In fact, the more one looks at Greuze's faces, the more ambiguous they become. Another perplexing case is the father in *Le Gâteau des rois* (Plate 11b). Here the face has a curious blankness which could suggest solemnity, even sadness, on this supposedly light-hearted occasion. The father's gaze is inward, almost as if he has forgotten his children, for he looks neither at the bearer of the gateau nor at the youngest child whose important role in the ritual is the allocation of slices. Yet his facial expression contradicts his posture, for the latter is attentive to the youngest child and his kneeling elder sister. Diderot tends to seek a coherent meaning in Greuze's expressive poses. But in one case, that of the female figure on the right hand side of *L'Accordée de village*, he is sensitive to, and perplexed by, her ambiguity. Is she a maid or elder sister to the bride? Diderot fastens on the label jealousy, but then finds that the young woman's face resists this closure of meaning, for she looks at the fiancé with 'des regards curieux, chagrins et courroucés' (I, 142). But one could go even further than Diderot in speculating upon the sister/maid's expression: one could see boredom, which is hinted at by her leaning posture and the position of her hand, apprehension, mistrust or admiration of the groom, even a trace of sentimentality in the eyes.

In my view, Greuze calls into question the intense legibility of Le Brun. He denies the notion of universal expression which had underpinned Le Brun's

schema, and demonstrates that one facial configuration may have any number of meanings. Instead of assuming that meaning can be imposed by the artist, Greuze places the weight of interpretation on the beholder. His work encourages a practice of decoding, yet refuses to provide unequivocal solutions.

Greuze appears constantly to challenge the pictorial distinctness of named passions which was vital to Le Brun's schema. In the case of *La Malédiction paternelle*, he looked to a double example of pain and suffering in preparation for his young man's face, that of Le Brun and the *Laocoön*. Yet the finished image appears to show the son projecting not so much pain and suffering as a combination of fear and defiance. The physical differences between the originals and Greuze's imitation are actually rather slight, yet the effect is very different. Thus Greuze deliberately borrows from Le Brunian iconography, but denies its coherence as a system of representing the passions. His faces are essentially resistant to the notion of typology.

Le Brun's schema was dependent on a parity between language and images, for each named passion had a distinct visual counterpart. Yet in Greuze's work this is not the case. The painting named *L'Effroi* (Louvre) apparently follows on in the same tradition of naming, but actually it demonstrates a slippage of labels: the image does not resemble terror, but instead depicts a young girl in a state of mild consternation. Moreover, there is little to distinguish this girl from many of his other female subjects which are called simply 'tête de jeune fille' and so on. Hence, it seems that the labels are not to be taken too seriously and that the title is a mere pretext.

Caylus emphasised the mild passions in his *concours*, but he conceived of their representation in Le Brunian terms, that is to say, he maintained the notion of distinct, nameable passions. I argued that this was barely feasible, given the tiny distinctions between such mild passions. Greuze, on the other hand, exploits the repertoire of the mild passions but pays scant attention to their names. In his work there is a realisation that according such nuances verbal counterparts is pointless.

Very often Greuze's faces appear strangely blank or neutral, as was the case with the father in *Le Gâteau des rois*. They do not bear the exaggerated frowns and gnashing teeth of Le Brun's illustrations, and yet one could not deny that in some fashion they convey intense emotions. Of course, other pictorial elements such as gesture, figure-groupings, colour and *chiaroscuro* play a part in the construction of meaning, so the faces are not obliged to work alone. But how is it that these impassive countenances are so expressive in themselves? A possible answer to this paradox is that they are deliberately blank so as to be able to absorb a number of different readings. In this respect, Greuze's faces are perfect illustrations of theories of sensualist physiognomics

put forward by Diderot and Condillac, and discussed in previous chapters. Condillac argued that our capacity to read meaning into a situation depends on our personal perceptual apparatus and on our past experience. Hence, people's faces trigger positive and negative sensations of varying strengths which translate into judgements. What counts, therefore, in such a physiognomical appraisal is the 'truth' of the response, or perhaps we should say its intensity, rather than any 'truth' which is inherent in the object of investigation. The same is true of Greuze's paintings. We can read very clear, strong messages into his faces, as Diderot does, but it is not the same thing as saying that this meaning is intrinsic to them.

This idea of deliberate blankness and 'reading in' is also evident in Greuze's *têtes d'expression*. This problematic category of painting will be fully explored in the next section. For now it is sufficient to understand the term in similar fashion to that of the Prix Caylus, as that of a female head depicted in a pose of heightened emotion. The origins of this pictorial type can be found in the Italian Baroque where Mary Magdalens and other female saints were depicted in a state of religious ecstasy. Typically they swooned in chaste abandonment, their eyes dramatically raised or lowered. Interestingly, one of Le Brun's paintings is derived from such a model, his *La Madeleine pénitente*, a work imbued with a rather heavy sexuality which is untypical of his *oeuvre* and which is not found in his *Conférence sur l'expression* (Plate 12a). Greuze's *La Prière du Matin* shows an unmistakable compositional resemblance to Le Brun's *Madeleine* (Plate 12b). Yet the image has much softer contours; the childlike quality of the woman's face strikes a titillating contrast with the womanly slope of her shoulder, so that a much more sensual, intimate relationship is established with the beholder than with Le Brun's picture, one of physical closeness and private sentiments.

Greuze's art works upon the beholder in a markedly different way from that of Le Brun. It plays much more upon the senses, particularly the erotic, and this is evident in Greuze's *L'Admiration et le désir* (Plate 13a). This work is modelled on Le Brun's *Le Ravissement* (Plate 13b), which is itself derived from Raphael's *Galatea*. However, Greuze exaggerates the size of the eyes, thickens the features and exposes the breast so that, rather than demonstrating the passion, the face is calculated to induce desire in the (presumably male) beholder. The erotic undertones of the Prix Caylus are fully brought out in Greuze's female subjects.

But Greuze's paintings do not function merely on their eroticism. What is striking about these emotionally charged young women is their mental absence. Their avoidance of a direct stare simultaneously ignores the beholder and compels him to intrude on their private expressive space: it is a deliberately provocative absorption. Hence the *tête d'expression* forcibly bears

out Michael Fried's assertion that, in the first half of the 1760s, absorption was increasingly becoming assimilated with expression.[16] What takes place in Greuze's work is a subtle but vital shift in the meaning of expression from the study of passion to the study of mood. Instead of externally demonstrated passions like those of Le Brun, inwardness and contemplation are stressed, and the relationship with the beholder becomes more indirect, almost voyeuristic. Again the weight of interpretation is placed upon the beholder: a surface blankness on the female's face resists meaning, yet simultaneously it invites speculation on what is going on underneath. This process appears to be what Diderot is alluding to in his *Essais sur la peinture*, when he talks of the intangible communication of 'sentiment' between the artist and the beholder which is more compelling and direct than if one passes through an intermediate Le Brunian vocabulary of gestures and expressions.

The ecstatic female, though in this softened eighteenth-century format, can be found in the work of many artists besides Greuze. The figure of Callirhoé in Fragonard's monumental *morceau de réception* of 1765, is literally absent from the picture because she has lost consciousness, a fact which enables Diderot to 'read in' his own dream sequence to the piece in the *Salon* of that year. David, who won the Prix Caylus in 1773, produced a number of 'vestales' and women in a state of rapture in his early career, though he later abandoned this form. Despite its implicitly gendered relationship between artist and subject, this type of image was commonly produced by women. It was adopted by several of Greuze's female pupils, among them Constance Meyer and Geneviève Brossard de Beaulieu. More famously it was employed many times by Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun. Her *têtes d'expression* are frequently portraits which depict specific individuals in poses of transient emotion. Most interesting are Vigée Le Brun's portraits of Emma, Lady Hamilton, for they bring together the vogue for the *tête d'expression* and a contemporary vogue for the enactment of 'attitudes' for which Lady Hamilton was famous.[17] To entertain the guests of her ambassador husband in Naples, Emma developed a type of drawing-room performance which recreated famous paintings and sculptures through the striking of dramatic poses and heightened facial expressions. Vigée Le Brun's *Lady Hamilton en Sibylle* is reminiscent of Domenichino's *Cumaean Sibyl* and the pose is characteristically theatrical, the wide eyes raised skywards and the head draped in a turban. Vigée Lebrun perceived an Academic seriousness in the *tête d'expression*. On her death, she bequeathed an annual sum to the St. Petersburg Academy to fund a prize for an expressive head in emulation of Caylus's *concours*, stating: 'Je veux qu'il soit placé un Capital à perpétuité pour fournir trois cents francs de Rente pour donnér Tous les ans cette somme a un éleve de l'academie de peinture à petersbourg pour une téte d'expression peint a L'huile'.[18]

Vigée-Lebrun was conscious that the blankness of the *tête d'expression* could be used to her advantage: instead of a vacant stare, the face could be adjusted to gave an air of spirituality. She exploited the distant or upwards gaze, and the latter's traditional association with genius, to make empty society women seem more interesting. She describes in her memoirs how she used to give those who were 'sans physionomie' an air of reverie in order to create a sense of psychological depth: 'Je tâchais autant qu'il m'était possible de donner aux femmes que je peignais l'attitude et l'expression de leur physionomie; celles qui n'avaient pas de physionomie, on le voit, je les peignais rêveuses et nonchalamment appuyées' (I, 57). With her more intelligent female sitters, she pursued this device much further than Greuze, whose female heads tend to be subtle evocations of mood rather than complex psychological studies.[19]

UN AIR DE FAMILLE: GREUZE'S FACIAL DEMOCRACY

Amongst the paintings exhibited by Greuze at his first Salon in 1755 was a *Tête d'après nature*, which formed a pendant to his portrait of the then director of the Académie, Louis de Sylvestre.[20] According to Edgar Munhall, this type of study and title was unknown to Salon audiences.[21] Unfortunately, Munhall does not expand upon this observation and one is left to speculate upon its meaning. It appears that Greuze's *tête* is remarkable for being depicted in isolation from the body and from any sort of pictorial action. It cannot be a history or genre painting for these very reasons. But nor does it fit easily into the category of portraiture since the sitter is deliberately left unidentified.

Munhall's remark touches on one of the most poorly understood areas of French painting in the second half of the eighteenth century: the representation of the unidentified single figures or heads. At this time there was a flourishing output of independent heads, both painted and sculpted. Salon *livrets* and *catalogues de vente* list a multitude of *têtes de caractère*, *têtes d'expression*, *têtes d'après nature*, *têtes de jeune fille*, *têtes de vieillard* and other variations. In addition, there were studies of heads labelled after passions such as *La Crainte* or *La Tristesse*, seemingly in the expressive tradition of Le Brun and Caylus. The task of distinguishing between these heads and categorising them is a daunting one as they appear to be the result of some very heterogeneous practices and traditions. Many of these heads elude traditional generic categorisation, and in particular their relation to portraiture is a complex one. Is the subject of the composition a real individual or an imaginary figure? Are there any formal properties which identify them as such? Is the purpose of the picture to depict a character or a passion, or does it involve a more intangible communication of meaning between the artist and the beholder? And what is the relation of these works to artistic tradition?

The titles of these pictures are often a hindrance to our understanding of the different forms and objectives. It was seen in Chapter 5 that the dividing line between the *tête d'expression* and the *tête de caractère* was hazy. Moreover, both labels could also be applied to portraits. For example, Roslin exhibited two heads in the Salon of 1769 entitled *études de caractère* which are almost certainly portraits. To some extent, the issue has been further confounded by art historians who have themselves made unsystematic use of terms such as *tête d'expression*.[22] Moreover, the cataloguer's preoccupation with ascertaining whether certain works are portraits or not has tended to eclipse more compelling questions such as what exactly a portrait is, and whether its conventions are being explicitly challenged by the artist.

Caylus, we have seen, conceived of the *tête d'expression* as the representation of a distinct moderate passion drawn from life after a young female model. But amidst this plethora of heads, it appears that the Prix Caylus was only part of a more general vogue for head-drawing which had diverse influences and motivations. It is now appropriate, therefore, to look beyond the Le Brunian tradition and to examine the *tête d'expression* in a wider context. The visual evidence for the *tête d'expression* is crucial since names and labels are unpredictable and unreliable.

Two main traditions are important to the *tête d'expression* in the second half of the eighteenth century. The first of these, described above, was the female figure in a state of heightened emotion. The second was the practice of depicting old men. The best known of these are by Fragonard who painted a series of heads of old men around 1763.[23] Also Taraval exhibited a series in the Salon of 1765, Renou in 1767 and Lépicié in 1769. The origins of these heads are mixed. Partly they stem from Netherlandish painting and particularly the work of Rembrandt and Rubens, but they are also found in Italian Baroque art. Often these were representations of apostles and other saints who were characterised by their simplicity and humanity, their gnarled faces displaying earthly wisdom, but who also had a spiritual, sometimes visionary quality. The expressive quality of such works, as with the female saints, lies in the absorbed state of the subjects rather than a demonstrative expressivity like Le Brun's. Often the expression is conveyed through the texture of the old men's rough-hewn features and their soft, wispy beards. Moreover, in the case of Fragonard's work especially, the subjects' features are actually obscured by the bold, loose brushwork which emphasises instead the artist's own subjectivity.

But we have yet to explain the nature and purpose of these various *têtes*. It may be helpful to align them with the development in British art of the 'fancy picture'. According to the organisers of a recent exhibition, 'The common element is the notion of a character study of an individual, or small group of individuals, presented in the format of a portrait, an idea which finds

its origins in the seventeenth-century European tradition'.[24] These works, whilst portraying subjects very often of humble origins — maids, beggars, and street urchins — are 'rich in meaning, allegory and innuendo'.[25] This is all the more relevant since the English fancy picture was first inspired by French artists such as Alexis Grimou and Philip Mercier. Clearly this tradition continued in the work of artists such as Chardin, Fragonard and Greuze who all portrayed simple figures, children and old men, who appeared to hold some greater meaning than their own simplicity, some moral vision or ethereal quality, although they were not identified as such. The English word 'fancy' at the time had a meaning similar to the word 'fantaisie', that is to say a work of the imagination, and the term 'fancy picture' was in fairly widespread use in Britain from the first half of the eighteenth century onwards; however, in France there appears to have been no equivalent term. Instead it is to the various *têtes* described above that one should look for the typical ingredients of the 'fancy picture'.

'Quelle différence y a-t-il entre une tête de fantaisie et une tête réelle?' inquires Diderot in his discussion of La Tour's work in his *Salon de 1767* (III, 168). By 'tête de fantaisie' he means one which is drawn from the imagination, or inspiration, as opposed to a 'tête réelle' which is drawn after a live model. Indeed, the *Encyclopédie* defines the word 'fantaisie' as follows: 'Peindre, dessiner de *fantaisie*, n'est autre chose que faire d'invention, de génie'.[26] Diderot's point is that one can appreciate the portraits of La Tour without needing to know his sitters, or even without knowing whether or not the works are based upon a particular sitter. Resemblance, he claims, is a merit in portraiture but is not an end in itself, and thus he challenges a basic assumption of eighteenth-century portraiture, that its chief function was to provide a likeness. Diderot implies that it is absurd that only those who know the sitter can truly appreciate the work of art. What counts in his view is something intrinsic to the work itself, namely its life-like quality: 'C'est que la chair et la vie y sont' (p. 168).

Diderot's question also brings to mind the speculation over Fragonard's *portraits de fantaisie*, a heterogeneous collection of identified and partially identified portraits, portraits of portraits, and imaginary heads. These works which, in terms of their size and formal qualities appear to form a distinct group, were actually given their collective name significantly after their execution. Echoing Diderot, Mary Sheriff has argued that the *portraits de fantaisie* are of interest precisely because they call into question the conventions and assumptions behind portraiture, and specifically the notion of resemblance.[27] Perhaps because these works were never exhibited and because there is no contemporary written evidence of how and why they came about, they have been considered both unique and enigmatic. Yet evidence suggests

that they were part of a more widespread questioning of forms and genres which took place in the second half of the eighteenth century and which is exemplified in Greuze's work.

* * *

The above discussion reveals a much greater instability in genre, category and purpose than has previously been recognised in eighteenth-century French art. Against this background of blurred boundaries, I will now explore Greuze's own conflation of heads, both imaginary and real, and demonstrate that this is a calculated aesthetic strategy on his part.

Greuze is well known for his experimentation with the genres. The common reading of his work is that he carefully re-fashioned genre painting, purging it of the comic, at times bawdy ugliness of his Netherlandish predecessors, and that he invested his humble subjects with a new 'bourgeois' respectability. Greuze effectively moved genre closer to history painting by heightening the moral content, and by giving it a sometimes tragic intensity which was traditionally the domain of history painting. But up till now Greuze's 'hybridity' has tended to be discussed solely in terms of his merging of two genres: history and genre painting.[28] Greuze's portraiture has received much less critical attention and this is strange in view of the fact that Greuze was a prodigious and accomplished portrait painter.[29] Rather surprisingly, the place of portraiture in Greuze's approach to the genres has also largely been ignored, despite its location between history and genre painting in the traditional hierarchy of the genres. Another category to have been ignored is Greuze's many independent heads which seemingly lie outside traditional generic classifications. By focusing especially on Greuze's heads, the common currency of the three highest genres, one can see an even greater fluidity between styles, genres and traditions in Greuze's work than has previously been acknowledged.

In Greuze's work there is a disregard for the conventions of head-drawing in his day. For his *Septime Sévère et Caracalla*, Greuze studied antiquity and the works of Poussin, as every aspiring history painter was supposed to do. In the finished work, Septimius's head is derived from a Classical statue, and Caracalla's head and pose, as Diderot observes, are taken from the Classical statue Antinous. And yet alongside these Classical models, the heads of Papinian and the senator are wholly different, as they are drawn from nature. Preparatory sketches for the work show this difference very clearly. In this work, therefore, there is an intrusion of the everyday, the natural, in other words the qualities of genre painting, into the realms of a history painting. Greuze deliberately denies the differences in form and rank between these head

types: within the same composition, he allows different types of heads to co-exist with no obvious hierarchy.

Greuze's facial mobility is also extended to portraiture, as can be seen in Greuze's portrait of the Académie model *Joseph* which he executed in 1755 (Plate 14a). In the life class, Joseph would have been treated as a cipher: an empty, impersonal body to be drawn limb by limb; his face would be unimportant, possibly turned away or obscured by shadow. Yet here Greuze moves Joseph out of the generalised sphere of history painting and relocates him in the individualised realm of portraiture. The portrait has a brooding quality, drawing consciously on Rembrandt, which highlights its subject's inner life and thought processes. In this work, therefore, Joseph is given a life and a psychological depth which are denied to him in his job. Again Greuze shows the mobility of heads between compositions.

The boundary between genre and portraiture in Greuze's work is every bit as fluid as that between his genre and history painting. One of his works depicts the famous *salonnière*, Madame Geoffrin, as a schoolmistress and her companions as naughty schoolgirls. Besides this, it has long been assumed that *La Mère bien aimée* is a portrait of the wealthy Laborde family who commissioned it, though the evidence for this is somewhat anecdotal. As well as portraits masquerading as genre pieces, one also finds the reverse. The face of Greuze's wife recurs in his portraits, genre pieces and in many 'têtes d'étude'. Most famously, she has been identified as the bride in *L'Accordée de village*. This is plausible in that his famous rendering of a betrothal scene was executed shortly after Greuze's own marriage to Anne-Gabrielle Babuty in 1759. She has also been identified as the central figure in *La Dame de charité*. The sheer recognisablility of Madame Greuze in these supposedly generalised genre settings gives her a dual status as both model and sitter for a portrait.

Greuze was certainly not unique in these practices. At the time it was fashionable to portray aristocratic sitters in fancy dress, as peasants or as Classical deities. Moreover, many artists have used the features of their wives or lovers for their compositions. But what is striking about his work is the lack of formal distinctions: often there is little pictorial evidence to suggest what is a portrait and what is not. For example, we tend to assume that a portrait can be made more 'individual' through a greater inclusion of detail, whereas history painting and genre lend themselves to more generalised representations, or 'types'. But in Greuze's case this is not so. Several of his identified portraits have rounded smudgy features which convey little of the 'individual' character. For example, his *Mademoiselle Barberie de Courteille* is little more than a stereotype of Rococo figure drawing.[30] Arguably, several of Greuze's genre works are more 'individualised' than this portrait of Mlle Barberie, for example his study of an old man's head for *La Dame de charité*,

where the figure's rough-hewn features give a sense of his worldly experience. The formal qualities of Greuze's work therefore provide few clues as to the category of head and its dependence or otherwise on a human subject.

Caylus conceived of his *concours* in terms of the requirements of history painting, yet his use of the live model and his emphasis on the close observation of facial features actually brought his procedures close to the techniques of portraiture. Equally, his emphasis on the *passions douces*, on those which could be observed in everyday life rather than imagined heroic ones, brought them closer to genre painting. In similar fashion, Greuze's many indeterminate, usually female, heads might seem to be linked to history painting, given their echoing of Le Brunian forms. But their softened features and their seductive air remove them from elevated ideal forms. They appear to be like portraits, for they have a kind of psychological or emotional intensity, depicting absorption, distraction or voluptuousness. But at the same time they are not portraits since they are not linked to an identified individual. Perhaps one could call them scaled-down genre scenes, but then many of these do not contain a narrative, which might be considered important to the genre. Thus Greuze's heads are elusive and escape traditional categorisation.

It has often been observed that the same heads seem to appear all over Greuze's work. Diderot in his *Salon de 1761* comments on the similarity between the father's heads in *L'Accordée de village*, *La Lecture de la bible* and *Le Paralytique*. Either they are the same person, he says, or they are 'trois frères avec un grand air de famille' (I, 44). Also, an anonymous 'Voyageur' describes the latest engravings of *La Dame bienfaisante*, *La Malédiction paternelle* and others to his English friend:

> Il semble du moins, en voyant les différentes gravures publiées d'après cet Artiste, que c'est toujours la même famille qui reparoît. Le caractere de tête du Vieillard de la nouvelle Estampe, ne differe pas beaucoup de celui de cet autre Vieillard que l'on remarque dans les estampes du *Père de Famille* lisant la Bible, de *L'Accordée du* [sic] *village*, du *Paralytique* etc.[31]

It was particularly Greuze's many aged father figures which struck viewers as so similar. Evidently he tended to use the same model repeatedly, so much so that one could ask if these studies of the same old man are actually portraits: since the head is so recognisable, he ceases to be merely a type and becomes an individual. This repetition of heads has led scholars to exploit the idea of narrative or frieze painting, almost like a strip-cartoon, in Greuze's work. Hence 'air de famille' has a double meaning, suggesting both the internal family resemblances, and the recurring 'characters' being depicted at various stages of life. This idea of sameness can also be linked to the increasingly formulaic but commercially viable female heads of Greuze's later years.

The term 'la même famille' was used critically by Caylus for it seemed to reveal a lack of versatility in the artist and an over-dependence on pattern-books and standard models, as well as a failure to account for nature's infinite variety. However, the term may connote something positive in the case of Greuze. In his work, Greuze suggests that all heads are essentially the same, that there is no formal or aesthetic difference between a portrait and a history or genre painting. Ideal and natural, high and low, all are treated in the same way. More radically, Greuze implies that there is no ostensible difference between a real and an imagined head since he confounds the relationship between sitter or model and the art product. Hence all his heads belong to the same family. Norman Bryson has seen the family in Greuze as representative of closure and introversion, but in fact 'family' may be interpreted as an all-inclusive term, suggesting openness and equality, in other words, that which extends beyond conventional biological and social ties.[32] And so the term 'un air de famille' evokes the homogeneity of all Greuze's heads, a sense of openness and creative space. Paradoxically, there is a great profusion of heads and great economy. His heads have a familial but also a familiar air, looking not just at each other but reflecting outwards to resemble the world of everyday encounters. Both types and individuals, they are sufficiently individualised to resemble real, ordinary people but they are also reassuringly similar.

Diderot saw Greuze as the modern-day Leonardo. Just as the Renaissance artist used to move effortlessly in society, recording the grotesque expressions of the populace with as great a sensitivity as the heads of his Madonnas, so too Greuze is a people's artist, a democrat. Both inside and outside the studio, the painter is a voracious head-hunter. Freely moving between genre and portraiture, and plundering the techniques of history painting even if he never gains official recognition for his labours, his heads are interchangeable.

Greuze, though well versed in the conventional models of academic head-painting, often subverts these traditions. He moves expression definitively away from a Le Brunian conception, through an emphasis on mood rather than passion and through his deliberately neutral facial configurations which place the weight of interpretation on the beholder. His work exemplifies a fluidity in French painting of the time between genres and also between real and painted heads. Because he contravenes the notion that a particular type of head should appear in a particular place, he constantly challenges the uniqueness and exclusivity of the different genres. His heads have an oddly reassuring sense of sameness because the concepts of genre and rank, type and individual, become blurred.

NOTES

1. In Camille Mauclair, *Jean-Baptiste Greuze* (Paris: L'Edition d'art, n.d.).
2. See Thomas Kirchner, *L'Expression des passions: Ausdruck als Darstellungsproblem in der französischen Kunst und Kunsttheorie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1991), chapter 8.
3. *Tetes de différens caracteres dédiées à Mr. J.C. Wille Graveur Ordinaire du Roy par son amy Greuze Peintre Ordinaire du Roy* (Paris, 1766). These were engraved by Pierre-Charles Ingouf; *Têtes de différents Caractéres d'après Monsieur Greuze Peintre du Roi Gravées par Carl Weisbrod* (Paris, n.d.) [c.1765].
4. See Anita Brookner, *Greuze: The Rise and Fall of an Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon* (London: Paul Elek, 1972), p. 126.
5. On this subject, see Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1985), chapter 5.
6. Brookner puts the case for Greuze's adherence to Dutch art and claims he learnt little in Italy; Willibald Sauerländer, on the contrary, stresses the 'Classical' success of the artist's visit to Italy: 'Pathosfiguren im Œuvre des Jean-Baptiste Greuze' in *Walter Friedländer zum 90. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 146-150; Thomas Gaechtens argues for Greuze's anti-academicism: 'The Tradition of Antiacademicism in French Art', in *The French Academy: Classicism and its Antagonists*, ed. by June Hargrove (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), pp. 206-18.
7. See especially Jean Seznec, 'Diderot et l'affaire Greuze', *Gazette des beaux arts*, 67 (mai-juin 1966), 339-56, and Crow, chapter 5.
8. *Voyage en Italie* (Paris, 1801). Barthélémy writes from Naples in February 1756 that Greuze and Gougenot are 'bien attachés à mon Comte' (p. 97). From Rome on 12th May of the same year, Barthélemy informs Caylus of Greuze's plan to prolong his Italian visit, and asks the Comte to justify the painter's decision to Marigny and to 'tous ceux qui peuvent s'intéresser au progrès de ce jeune homme qui paroît avoir un grand talent' (p. 134).
9. *Salons*, ed. by Jean Seznec, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), II, 151. All subsequent references to Diderot's *Salons* are from this edition.
10. See Edgar Munhall, 'Les Dessins de Greuze pour "Septime Sévère"', *L'Oeil*, 124 (1965), 22-29.
11. See especially Diderot's comments in chapter 1 of his *Essais sur la peinture: Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1988), p. 671.
12. Crow p. 270, note 22. See also, F. Monod and L. Hautecoeur, *Les Dessins de Greuze conservés à L'Académie des Beaux-Arts de St Petersbourg* (Paris, 1922).
13. *Souvenirs*, 2 vols, ed. by Claudine Herrmann (Paris: Des Femmes, 1984), I, 35-36.
14. Andrew Mark Ledbury, 'Greuze, Sedaine and Hybrid Genre in Late Eighteenth-Century France' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1996), p. 137.
15. Such a reading has been offered spontaneously by a number of students in my seminars at the University of Exeter.
16. *Absorption and Theatricality: Genre and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 61.
17. See Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on Some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1967), chapter 3; Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his Collection*, exhibition catalogue (London: British Museum Press, 1996), pp. 252-61, 271.
18. Quoted in Joseph Baillio, *Elisabeth Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842)*, exhibition catalogue, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1982 (Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 126.
19. See Mary Sheriff's discussion of Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of Madame de Staël as her fictional heroine, Corinne: *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), chapter 8.
20. Brookner (p. 95) claims that this is the *Ecolier endormi sur son livre*; its engraving is known as *Le Petit paresseux*.
21. 'The Variety of Genres in the Work of Greuze 1725-1805', *Porticus*, 10/11 (1987-88), 20-29 (p. 22). Munhall points out that the pastellist Perronneau also habitually exhibited 'autres têtes' alongside his portraits of identified subjects.
22. See Martin's catalogue of Greuze's work and that of the Musée Tournus.
23. Georges Wildenstein uses the label *têtes d'expression* to describe these, though it was not used in the eighteenth century. *The Paintings of Fragonard* (Aylesbury, Bucks: Phaidon, 1960), p. 11.

24. Martin Postle, exhibition catalogue, *Angels and Urchins: The Fancy Picture in Eighteenth-Century British Art* (Nottingham: Djanogly Art Gallery, 1998), p. 4.
25. Ibid., p. 4.
26. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols (Paris, 1751-65), article 'Fantaisie', VI (1756), 403.
27. See Mary Sheriff, *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), chapter 5.
28. See for example, Antoine Schnapper, 'Greuze, peintre d'histoire ou peintre de genre?' *Commentaire*, 12 (1980/81), 597-601.
29. An exception to this is Marianne Roland-Michel, 'Diderot, Greuze et le portrait', in *Diderot et Greuze, Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand (16 novembre 1984)*, ed. by Antoinette and Jean Ehrard (Clermont-Ferrand: Université de Clermont-Ferrand II, Centre de Recherches Révolutionnaires et Romantiques, 1986), pp. 97-106.
30. Clearly this is not the case for all Greuze's portraits. Those of his father-in-law, Babuty, and the engraver, Wille, are powerful studies of thoughtful individuals.
31. *Lettres d'un voyageur à Paris à son ami Charles Lovers* [...] *sur les nouvelles estampes de Mr. Greuze*, (London, 1779), p. 14.
32. *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 128-29.

CHAPTER 7

FACIAL EXPRESSION IN THE THEATRE

The actor's performance has three main components: voice, gesture and facial expression. Of all these, facial expression has probably been given the least consideration by dramatic theorists and historians of theatre; however, in eighteenth-century theatre, the face had a particularly active role in conveying information and emotion to the audience. Contemporary accounts of acting repeatedly talk of the *jeu de physionomie*, by which was meant the rapid play of facial parts, the feats of physical agility and mercurial swiftness by which the actor expressed the manifold passions, an operation which often took place independently of the body. Similar aesthetic criteria to painting governed theatrical expression in this period: the agitation of the soul by the passions was thought to be reflected in the movements of the face in an eloquent and expressive display, yet this display had to be measured so as to avoid contortion and manner. Avoidance of the grimace, which was the antithesis of the *jeu de physionomie*, was paramount. But because theatre is a live and moving art form, this shared aesthetic gave rise to a different set of practical and theoretical problems from those of painting: theatrical performance necessitated the arrangement of the passions in time as well as space, creator and art object were one and the same, unlike the painter and his canvas, and the actor's body was the vehicle both for his own passions and those of his role.

This chapter explores the associations of the term *jeu de physionomie*, focusing on the actor's face as an expressive medium, both in practical terms and symbolically. The preceding chapters on painting serve as a point of comparison and contrast, and this parallel is also historically apt since dramatic theory and practice were at this time deriving their own models from the visual arts. The chapter falls into four sections. The first part discusses contemporary theories of stage performance and reveals in what ways actors used their faces in relation to the rest of their body and to speech. The second part discusses the role of the face in pantomime performance, focusing on the face of David Garrick and the theories of the dancer Noverre. The third section deals with the practical aspects of stagecraft and especially the conditions which affect the presentation and perception of the actor's face: the proximity of the audience, lighting, make-up and masks. The final section analyses the discourse of passions and character in relation to shifting conceptions of theatrical genres. The main source material is the body of theoretical writing on the theatre from the 1740s to the 1770s. This period sees an increase in works on performance

specifically written for actors, which coincides with moves to give actors professional status and set up academies for acting.

THE ACTOR'S CRAFT

It is difficult to construct a paradigm of facial expression in the eighteenth-century French theatre, for some very distinct acting styles were fostered. French and Italian actors indulged in perpetual rivalry.[1] Comedy and tragedy required very different techniques, as indeed did the various strands of comic: *haut comique*, *bas comique* and farce. Moreover, the advent of new genres such as the *drame* and the *comédie larmoyante* in the middle of the century necessitated a thorough reassessment of acting practice. Techniques of stage performance also varied according to successive generations of actors and even individual actors. Yet despite these differences in tradition and style, there was a surprising convergence of views on facial expression towards the middle years of the century, with actors from different traditions holding the same ideals and recommending the same techniques. This section looks at evolving acting styles at the Comédie Française and at the Comédie Italienne to establish the basis of this convergence.

As the centrepiece of 'official' French taste the Comédie Française may usefully be compared with the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. The acting style which developed in this theatre during the seventeenth century and was still current in the eighteenth century aimed to depict strong passions but without offending the *bienséances* through loss of dignity in the actor. Such a compromise was achieved by giving almost exclusive attention to the face.[2] Here the passions were concentrated and the *jeu de physionomie* was all: contrasting strong passions were rendered expressively by the actor in an artful and calculated performance. Despite the face's intense activity, the head was heavy as it bore a head-dress or wig, giving it a static air. Bodily movement was kept to a minimum and gesture was governed by certain rules of decorum: actors did not sit down, lie down or run on stage.[3] They stood, often in a curved line, and faced outwards to the audience rather than turning naturalistically towards each other. Certain hand gestures, such as raising the arms above the head, were also regarded as unseemly. The importance of presentation to the audience was placed above the characters' interaction and therefore the demonstrative potential of the face in full frontal position was fully exploited.

This type of performance was underpinned by the rules of rhetoric.[4] The principle of *actio* or bodily eloquence was stressed in treatises by Quintilian and Cicero which were still widely referred to in the eighteenth century. Parallels were frequently drawn between the actor's craft and the art of the preacher or lawyer, for they had the common purpose of moving an audience

through verbal and bodily eloquence. Actors had the further incentive of borrowing from the practices of church orators in the hope of acquiring respectability.[5] The tragic actor's custom of addressing the audience directly would seem to stem from this tradition. Furthermore, a vocabulary of codified gestures corresponding to different passions had been built up over time and was understood by different types of audience. This can be seen clearly in the sets of illustrated hand movements in John Bulwer's double treatise *Chirologia or the Natural Language of the Hand* and *Chironomia, or the art of manual rhetoric* (1644). This basic vocabulary has been shown to straddle both comic and tragic acting techniques.[6]

Responses to this use of the body as a pedestal for an expressive head were mixed. 'Sir' John Hill, the English theatrical commentator and translator of Rémond de Sainte Albine's *Le Comédien* (1747), notes approvingly French actors' exaggerated play of facial expression which contrasts with the stasis of their bodies, and considers that they avoid the wild gesticulations of English declamation:

> The French have many of them extravagancies enough in their playing, but the best of them depend upon the expression of their countenance, and the tone of their voice, more than upon those expansions of the arms we are so fond of, for the describing their several passions. They had rather grief should be read upon their cheek, love in their eye, and rage upon their forehead, than that they should all be expressed by the same violent action, which is in reality expressive of none of them.[7]

But in France this restriction on the actor's bodily expression was viewed more critically. The disadvantage of restricting expressivity to such a small area of the body was that the *jeu de physionomie* was often exaggerated and used for effect rather than eloquence. Diderot, in his reply to a letter from the novelist and former actress at the Comédie Italienne, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, states emphatically: 'Il ne faut pas jouer seulement du visage mais de toute sa personne', and he berates the stiffness of French actors: 'Ne soyez donc pas plus symétrisés, raides, fichés, compassés et plantés en rond'.[8] He expresses his impatience with decorum:

> O le maudit, le maussade jeu que celui qui défend d'élever les mains à une certaine hauteur, qui fixe la distance à laquelle un bras peut s'écarter du corps, et qui détermine comme au quart de cercle, de combien il est convenable de s'incliner! Vous vous résoudrez donc toute votre vie à n'être que des mannequins?[9]

Here Diderot uses an unfavourable image from the sphere of painting, referring to the 'mannequin' or artist's model, a lifeless studio dummy. In this he overturns the common trend of parallels with painting for the purpose of elevation.

The acting style just described may be characterised as 'Le Brunian'. Attention placed solely on the head and face, the static and contrasting representation of the passions, the extremes of passions tending towards

exaggerated facial play, the clear demonstration of the passions rather than a more allusive suggestion of them: all are typical of what Le Brun had come to represent for painters by the middle of the eighteenth century. In practice as well, Le Brun's lecture on expression and his illustrations were widely used by actors throughout Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[10] His 'common drawing book' for the instruction of young artists was absorbed into theatre practice at a time when the actor's training was being taken increasingly seriously.

Le Brun's influence on English acting theory has been better documented than his influence in France.[11] However, one can assume that French actors were acquainted with Le Brun, probably through the 1702 Picart edition or Audran's 1727 edition. In any case, the actor's study of painting and drawing was unanimously recommended by theorists. For example, in his *Encyclopédie* article 'Déclamation Théâtrale', Marmontel encourages actors to look at history painting, especially Le Sueur's *St Bruno Preaching*, Rembrandt's *Lazarus* and Carracchi's *Descent from the Cross*, and Clairon recommends in her memoirs that actors take drawing lessons.[12] The motive for this was both humanist and political: at a time when actors were denied many basic civil and religious rights, the actor's craft could be legitimised through comparison with other liberal arts.

Whilst the 'Le Brunian' style persisted in tragic acting for much of the century, there is evidence of a significant change of direction towards the middle of the eighteenth century. At the Comédie Française, a style of acting was initiated in the late 1740s and 1750s by Clairon, Lekain and to a lesser extent Dumesnil, which greatly increased the use of movement and gesture.[13] The reasons for this upsurge in gestural performance are numerous and varied. In part it coincided with Voltaire's aim to seek a new and fresh contact with Ancient Greek and Roman theatre by bypassing the norms of classical drama which had been prescribed in the *Grand siècle*. The new gestural style was a conscious revival of the pantomime of the Ancients. This was a dumbshow performance by a masked dancer, accompanied by a chorus, which became popular in the reign of Augustus, though its origins were probably Greek. As early as 1719, the Abbé Du Bos had called for a revival of pantomime which would reinstate the expressive powers of gesture in the French theatre but not until the mid-1700s did it have any practical impact on the French stage. The use of gesture also corresponded to Voltaire's particular brand of tragedy which emphasised spectacle. English theatre, as may be deduced from John Hill's comment, involved a greater use of gesture and may well have brought change to the French stage. Finally, the gradual infiltration of a different tradition, that of the Italian theatre, is a probable source.

The new style was characterised by much greater physical action. Voltaire's description of Dumesnil in *Mérope* in 1743 shows her raising her arms and running on-stage, thus breaking with several conventions of stage movement in an impassioned performance:

> Lorsque dans Mérope, les yeux égarés, la voix entrecoupée, levant une main tremblante, elle allait immoler son propre fils; quand Narbas l'arrête, quand, laissant tomber son poignard, on la vit s'évanouir entre les bras de ses femmes, et qu'elle sortit de cet état de mort avec les transports d'une mère; lorsque ensuite s'élançant aux yeux de Polyphante, traversant en un clin d'oeil tout le théâtre, les larmes dans les yeux, la pâleur sur le front, les sanglots à la bouche, les bras étendus, elle s'écria: «Barbare, il est mon fils!».[14]

The intrusion of physiology into this description is striking: pallor, swooning, sobbing, all preventing the measured declamation of verse, which recalls the physiological passions of Parsons and Watelet. Clairon's declamation too would often be choked with tears.[15] But despite this use of gesture, actors were not given licence to display unrestrained physicality. Certain rules of decorum still pertained, as is revealed by Clairon's extreme censure in her memoirs of the excesses of certain actors and of the public's approbation.

It would be wrong to infer that, with the increased use of gesture on the stage of the Comédie Française, the role of the face diminished in importance. On the contrary, the face had a particularly crucial role in this non-verbal performance. Clairon is most emphatic about the expressivity of the face:

> Tous les mouvemens de l'âme doivent se lire sur la physionomie: des muscles qui se tendent, des veines qui se gonflent, une peau qui rougit, prouvent une émotion intérieure, sans laquelle il n'est jamais de grand talent. Il n'est point de rôle qui n'ait des jeux de visage de la plus grande importance (p. 265).

She also recommends that actors improve their facial expression by studying anatomy, especially Buffon's descriptions (plundered from Parsons) in his *Histoire naturelle*. In their emphasis on multiplicity and nuance, Clairon's comments have much in common with Watelet's paradigm: the face reflects the movements of the soul, there is an awareness of the physiological processes — both muscular and circulatory — which bring this about, and the mobility of the face is seen as aesthetically desirable. Hence Clairon's opinions are reflective of a contemporary aesthetic: she moves acting at the Comédie Française away from the ponderous 'Le Brunian' style and towards a lighter and more rapid style which reflects Watelet's theories of the passions. Besides having much in common with Watelet, Clairon's opinions are similar to those of Caylus, for both insist upon the maximisation of expression. Caylus had praised Van Loo for not concealing the face of Agamemnon in his painting of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and this same striving, not to say straining, for explicitness underpinned his *concours*. The same is true of Clairon's preferred acting style where every shade and shape of emotion must be visible to the spectator.

Other theatre commentators stressed the nuances of facial play, which were quite different from the dramatic contrasts between the passions which had hitherto been a part of acting styles, particularly tragic ones.[16] In his *Encyclopédie* article 'Déclamation théâtrale', Marmontel extols the *jeu mixte*, which he defines in the following way:

> Nous appelons *jeu mixte* ou *composé*, l'expression d'un sentiment modifié par les circonstances, ou de plusieurs sentimens réunis [...] Le comédien a donc toûjours au moins trois expressions à réunir, celle du sentiment, celle du caractère, & celle de la situation: règle peu connue & encore moins observée (IV, 683-84).

He suggests that the essence of drama is the conflict between transient emotion, underlying character and dramatic situation. This conflict, he claims, should be visible on the face and in the voice, an effect which requires infinite subtlety and control in the actor. Such an emphasis on contradictory passions experienced simultaneously, and also on the middle range of the passions, is very similar to Caylus's insistence on the mixed passions in his *concours*.

Facial expression was traditionally seen as having an important subsidiary role in the art of declamation. Its purpose was to enhance verbal delivery through the eloquent representation of the passions. However, the eighteenth century in general saw the decadence of declamation, with audiences frequently finding the heightened tones artificial and there were repeated moves especially by Lekain and Clairon to bring the language of theatre closer to everyday speech.[17] Even under Baron and Lecouvreur, declamation was not viewed as favourably as at the height of Racine's career and the term gradually acquired a pejorative connotation.

In contrast, facial expression appears to have become increasingly important and it gradually acquired a status independent of language. In her memoirs, Clairon relates how her silent display of facial expression once actually made up for a flaw in written drama. Whilst rehearsing the role of Monime in Racine's *Mithridate*, she notices a line which states that the gods have silenced her three times, yet she can only find two instances prior to this. In performance, therefore, she invents a third instance: 'Je m'avançai avec la physionomie d'une femme qui va tout dire [...] et je fis à l'instant succéder un mouvement de crainte qui me défendait de parler' (p. 266).

This perception of the face's importance is partly due to the increased prestige of the *jeu muet*. This was the name given to the actions of the character being addressed by the speaker, and also to the speaker's own actions before and during speaking. The *jeu muet* was an important part of comic acting, but at the Comédie Française it was established practice for tragic actors not to look at each other or to interact but instead to face the audience.[18] Commonly they performed facial movements and gestures only when they were speaking. This comparative neglect of the *jeu muet* at the Comédie

Française may well be the reason for Marmontel's comment in the *Encyclopédie* that 'la plûpart de nos acteurs ont trop négligé cette partie [*jeu muet*], l'une des plus essentielles de la *déclamation*' (IV, 684). However, it appears that Clairon's call for change remedies this situation. Her statement, 'Il n'est point de rôle qui n'ait des jeux de visage de la plus grande importance: bien écouter, montrer par les mouvements du visage que l'âme s'émeut de ce qu'on entend, de ce qu'on dit, est un talent aussi précieux que celui de bien dire' (p. 265), clearly refers to both the listening and the speaking character and acknowledges the importance of reacting as much as acting. Consequently she argues for a type of acting which takes greatest account of what can be conveyed by non-verbal means.

Clairon's comments point to a style which involves greater interaction with other actors and consequently less with the audience. Paradoxically, therefore, the face has a more indirect role in the transmission of emotion, for action moves away from rhetorical Le Brunian models which demonstrate the passions directly to the audience. Yet this creation of a 'fourth wall' through the actor's absorption actually results in greater expressivity, a view which is expressed by Diderot in his *De la poésie dramatique* when he praises the Italian actors for their practice of ignoring the spectator. This view also relates closely to his description of the public and private Grimm in the *Essais sur la peinture*.[19] Such a state of dramatic absorption is also strongly reminiscent of the development of the *tête d'expression* from the demonstration of the passion to a more indirect communication of a mood or absorbed state.

Therefore, at the Comédie Française, a 'Le Brunian' style of acting which gave unprecedented prominence to the face and displayed strong passions directly to the audience, was challenged in mid-century by a different use of the face: this involved a more indirect form of facial play and a more nuanced presentation of the passions in the spirit of Watelet. But the reforms of Clairon and her contemporaries were only a partial step away from tradition in a similar way that the Prix Caylus was for the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. These tendencies were taken to their logical conclusion in the pantomime performances of Garrick and Noverre.

* * *

Acting at the Comédie Italienne also underwent significant changes between the late seventeenth century and the time it merged with the Opéra Comique in 1762.[20] In general it is possible to trace a greater emphasis on facial expression at the expense of gesture. This development could be attributed to the partial refinement of the Italian theatre: the restriction of bodily movement gave rise to a more spiritual form of acting which developed alongside traditional stage-

play and buffoonery.[21] Most significant in the Italian theatre in this period was the gradual eclipse of the mask. Traditionally, *commedia dell'arte* characters were portrayed by means of masks, a device which underlined their stock types. But in late seventeenth-century France, actors began to shed their masks and, by the time of the return of the Italians in 1716 after their banishment, it became even more established practice. Clearly this was in some measure a response to the tastes of French audiences.[22] When Giovanni Bissoni, known as 'Scapin', made his début, the audience demanded that he remove his mask.[23] However, Arlequin remained masked long after the other characters, with actors such as Carlo Bertinazzi donning the mask only when they played this particular role.[24] The persistence of Arlequin's mask could well be due to his highly symbolic character. I will discuss the full significance of the disappearance of the mask from French theatre in a later section; for now, the issue is how Italian actors were instructed to use their faces in the absence of masks.

François Riccoboni, an actor at the Comédie Italienne, was the son of Luigi Riccoboni or 'Lelio', who led the troupe back from exile in 1716, and he was also the husband of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni. His *L'Art du théâtre* (1750) takes stock of current theatre practice and makes recommendations to actors on how to improve their performance. Riccoboni devotes one section to the *jeu muet* which he considers to be 'la partie la plus estimable dans un Comédien' (p. 75). Yet interestingly Riccoboni privileges the face over the rest of the body, devoting nearly all of his comments to facial expression, and arguing at the end that bodily movement should be restricted, and that the silent actor should defer to the one who is speaking. In contrast to the Italian tradition, the body seems to have become less important, even a hindrance.

Riccoboni gives a graphic account of how to use the face in the *jeu muet*. He claims that 'Tout le monde cherche à jouer du visage & tous les Acteurs n'ont pas ce talent' (p. 76). This comment reveals how much importance was placed on facial movement in his day but it also reflects the tendency of actors to overact with their faces. He claims that actors' facial contortions can all too easily turn into a grimace, by which he means an extreme or contorted facial expression. Riccoboni stresses that, whereas some actors are fortunate to be born with strong features, facial mobility is a trained art and muscular flexibility is something which can be worked on. This involves stretching and flexing the muscles for maximum expressivity. The upper part of the face, for Riccoboni, must be the most supple: 'Le haut du visage doit joüer sans cesse; la bouche & le menton ne doivent se mouvoir que pour articuler'. The eyes which reveal inner states must be very lively and should be assisted by movements of the forehead. It is possible that Riccoboni emphasised the upper facial parts because he envisaged the performance of his day as more refined

and spiritual, and saw the mouth as associated with the traditional earthy physicality of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Riccoboni's comments on the actor's face have much in common with those of Clairon. Both see facial mobility as the key to expression, but it is the nuances rather than the extremes of facial movement which are important for them. They share the view that this agile but controlled performance may be achieved through muscular flexibility and knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Behind their arguments lies a desire for explicitness and transparency on the part of the actor. Hence it appears that Italian and French traditions converge, both giving increased importance to the face, and also setting down similar criteria for the use of the face.

PANTOMIME PERFORMANCES

Contemporary theories of pantomime asserted that gesture and facial expression constituted an unfettered natural language of their own, superior to instituted verbal language. The visual quality of gesture made it more poignant than ordinary language, something which is suggested in the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* where Diderot describes how he used to cover his ears whilst watching stage performance. Moreover, its rapidity and simultaneity meant that it was capable of conveying much more than speech. Dorval, in Diderot's *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, suggests that the playwright should compose dramas with a certain sparseness, with eloquent silences to be filled by the actor's physical interpretation, and he draws the parallel with recitative in singing. In fact, great use of gesture was made in the new genre, the *drame*, as can be seen from numerous stage directions in Diderot's *Le Fils naturel* and *Le Père de famille*, and also further afield in Lessing's drama.[25] But more than just thinning out dramatic dialogue, Dorval suggests that true eloquence only comes about via the breakdown of instituted language:

> Qu'est ce qui nous affecte dans le spectacle de l'homme animé de quelque grande passion? Sont-ce ses discours? Quelquefois. Mais ce qui émeut toujours, ce sont des cris, des mots inarticulés, des voix rompues, quelques monosyllables qui s'échappent par intervalles, je ne sais quel murmure dans la gorge, entre les dents.[26]

At the point where man is the most inarticulate he is actually the most expressive: the cries of nature and spontaneous gestures take over, revealing strong natural passions. Pantomime is seldom discussed in terms of facial expression; however, I wish now to look closely at how the face was used in pantomime performance, how this was described by spectators, and how it operated in relation to the body.

The ideal of facial malleability is actualised in the face of David Garrick. As both a comic and a tragic actor, Garrick had a versatility which was not matched by his French contemporaries, Clairon and Lekain, who only

performed tragedy. Moreover, Garrick's legendary facial agility was the subject of numerous anecdotes and commentaries.[27] On his visits to Paris in 1751 and for longer periods between 1763 and 1765, he was fêted by d'Holbach, Madame Geoffrin and their circles and met Marmontel, Clairon and Lekain.[28] Though he never performed on the French stage, he was immortalised through accounts of his drawing-room performances by Diderot, Grimm and others.

The most famous and compelling description in French of Garrick's face is Diderot's in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien*:

> Garrick passe sa tête entre les deux battants d'une porte, et, dans l'intervalle de quatre à cinq secondes, son visage passe successivement de la joie folle à la joie modérée, de cette joie à la tranquillité, de la tranquillité à la surprise, de la surprise à l'étonnement, de l'étonnement à la tristesse, de la tristesse à l'abattement, de l'abattement à l'effroi, de l'effroi à l'horreur, de l'horreur au désespoir, et remonte de ce dernier degré à celui d'où il était descendu. Est-ce que son âme a pu éprouver toutes ces sensations et exécuter, de concert avec son visage, cette espece de gamme? Je n'en crois pas, ni vous non plus.[29]

This passage has all the ingredients of Watelet's paradigm of expression: speed, successivity, multiplicity, nuance and degree. But more than this, Diderot's description reads like a slow-motion clip from a film, the repetition of the construction 'de la...à' actually hindering the progress of the passions. Reading the words either silently or out loud takes longer than the actual performance time of a few seconds. Manifestly Diderot is pointing to the eloquence of a pantomime display which leaves verbal language trailing behind: the act of naming the passions becomes both meaningless and impossible in the face of such speed and versatility. This description also recalls the passage in the *Essais sur la peinture*, discussed in chapter 3, where Diderot describes the progress of an angry man and sheds the static Le Brunian image of the passion through rapid change.

In fact, Diderot is deliberately slowing down Garrick's movements in order to anatomise his technique. For the point he is making is that this *is* technique, that such a supreme degree of control must be part of a calculated performance. Diderot takes an unorthodox stance in his *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, emphasising the difference between an exquisite sequence of passions as performed by the actor and their uncontrolled nature in reality. For Diderot, Garrick's rigorous control over his performance is proof of his greatness.[30] He and Clairon are upheld as models for their degree of control over themselves, for their calculated performance which uses not sensibility but intelligence. This is in opposition to the more inspirational playing of Dumesnil which is uneven, sometimes sublime and at other times mediocre. Great actors, Diderot claims, have recourse to the 'modèle idéal': by forming a mental image of perfection, they transcend the limits of their bodies and literally become a second person.[31] The process is described in the preface to

the *Salon de 1767*, where Diderot imagines a conversation between Garrick and the Marquis de Chastelux. Garrick claims that it is not enough to play from inside oneself: 'Quelque sensible que Nature ait pu vous former, si vous ne jouez que d'après vous-même, ou la nature subsistante la plus parfaite que vous connoissez, vous ne serez que médiocre'.[32] Instead he becomes an imaginary other: 'Lorsque je m'arrache les entrailles, lorsque je pousse des cris inhumains; ce ne sont pas mes entrailles, ce sont les cris d'un autre que j'ai conçu et qui n'existe pas' (p. 64). Clairon too is praised for her rigorous control over her facial expressions, for her ability to plan out in advance every change of feature and to be, in her own words, 'maîtresse de ma physionomie' (p. 316). Her bodily education is achieved through a process of repetition and memory.

Diderot's description of Garrick alludes to the 'gamme' or musical scale of the passions. This is echoed by Grimm:

> M. de Carmontelle a dessiné Garrick en attitude tragique, et vis-à-vis de ce Garrick il a placé un Garrick comique entre les deux battants d'une porte, qui surprend Garrick le tragique, et se moque de lui. Je voudrais que ce tableau fût gravé. Pendant qu'il se faisait peindre, comme sa pétulance l'empêche d'être un moment tranquille, il s'exerçait à passer par des nuances imperceptibles de l'extrême joie à l'extrême tristesse, et jusqu'au désespoir et à l'effroi. Cela pourrait s'appeler la gamme du comédien: car pourquoi n'y aurait-il pas une gamme de passions comme de sons successifs?[33]

Just as painting refers to the spectrum of colour with its various nuances to describe the passions, so theatre refers to music, its sister art.

Garrick is the supreme Protean actor. This is at a time when the Proteus myth is being interpreted *pathognomically* as well as *physiognomically*, referring to the actor's metamorphosis through rapidly changing emotions. In the dramatic theorist Bertrand de la Tour's words: 'Le visage, les gestes, les allures, la voix, tout le corps d'un Acteur doit être un Prothée, qui change à tout moment pour prendre l'empreinte des divers sentimens de son rôle'.[34] Rapidity of change is privileged over change itself. Or rather, change is brought about by rapidity. For Garrick is also able to bring about physiognomical transitions: an Englishwoman commissions the portrait of her relative, a certain Milord, who detests having his portrait painted. She asks Garrick to pose in his place which he does after a careful study of the man's features and characteristics. The portrait is so successful that the Milord admires its resemblance to himself. Another anecdote tells of Garrick modelling the head of Fielding for Hogarth after the writer's death. Hogarth, a good friend of Fielding, is surprised and shocked by the resemblance. It is this engraving which provides the frontispiece for a posthumous edition of Fielding's works.[35]

Garrick can therefore change his permanent features so much that they have a portrait-like resemblance to another person, living or dead. He achieves

this physical impossibility not by twisting or contorting his face into grimace or *charge* but by a controlled aesthetic transition involving the lightning play of his mobile features. In other words, he achieves a *physiognomical* change through extreme *pathognomy*. The rapidity of Garrick's facial movements serves to obscure his technique, and to his audience he seems to possess a magical, superhuman power which enables him to transcend the physical limits of his body. It is as if the rapidity of his facial expressions allowed him to 'take off' and leave behind his muscles and flesh. Like expression in painting, the physical allows access to the soul but in the best paintings the soul transcends the physical. Grimm provides a most telling description of this process:

> Le grand art de David Garrick consiste dans la facilité de s'aliéner l'esprit, et de se mettre dans la situation du personnage qu'il doit représenter; et lorsqu'il s'en est une fois pénétré, il cesse d'être Garrick, et il devient le personnage dont il est chargé. Aussi, à mesure qu'il change de rôle, il devient si différent de lui-même qu'on dirait qu'il change de traits et de figure, et qu'on a toute la peine du monde à se persuader que ce soit le même homme. On peut aisément défigurer son visage, cela se conçoit; mais Garrick ne connaît ni la grimace ni la charge; tous les changements qui s'opèrent dans ses traits proviennent de la manière dont il s'affecte intérieurement; il n'outre jamais la vérité, et il sait cet autre secret inconcevable de s'embellir sans autre secours que celui de la passion.[36]

Grimm's view of Garrick's technique is vastly different from that of Diderot, for he believes that Garrick achieves his transformations through a process of empathy with his characters. But the outward effect is the same: a smooth and expressive performance.

The face of Garrick is proposed as a model for dancers by Noverre. Jean-Georges Noverre, himself a dancer, choreographer and theatre manager, worked alongside Garrick at Drury Lane from 1754-56 and helped to spread the actor's reputation before his visits to France through his eulogy of Garrick in his *Lettres sur la danse* (1760). There are striking similarities between their theory and practice of expressive pantomime performance.[37] The *Lettres sur la danse*, which ran to several editions and were published throughout Europe, are Noverre's manifesto: in them he seeks to raise dance's status by showing that it is an art of imitation and is thus equal with the other liberal arts of poetry, painting, sculpture and music. He also argues for the incorporation of the Aristotelian principle of action into his ballets and gives them heroic subjects taken from the tragedies of Racine, Crébillon and Voltaire. Ballet, he claims, already has an advantage over other arts in that it is a form of pantomime, the noble art of the Ancients which speaks directly, without mediation, to the spectator.

The ninth Letter of the *Lettres sur la danse* is a passionate statement of the expressivity of the face which is clearly influenced by contemporary art theory. For Noverre the face is more expressive than any verbal declamation:

C'est [...] sur le visage de l'homme, que les passions s'impriment, que les mouvemens et les affections de l'ame se déploient, et que le calme, l'agitation, le plaisir, la douleur la crainte et l'espérance se peignent tour-à-tour. Cette expression est cent fois plus animée, plus vive et plus précieuse, que celle qui résulte du discours le plus véhement.[38]

Here Noverre moves beyond Marmontel and Clairon, stating boldly that facial expression is more than an adequate replacement for language. This eloquence is largely a question of speed: the face is more rapid than ordinary language and can therefore convey the lightning effects of the passions directly, without an intermediary: 'c'est un éclair qui part du coeur, qui brille dans les yeux, et qui, répandant sa lumière sur tous les traits, annonce le bruit des passions, et laisse voir, pour ainsi dire, l'ame à nu' (p. 97).

Crucially, Noverre sees the face as co-ordinating the whole body: 'Le visage est l'organe de la scène muette, il est l'interprète fidèle de tous les mouvemens de la pantomime' (pp. 97-8). Bodily movement, therefore, does not convey meaning transparently but requires an interpreter, namely the face; gestures are empty until the face can give them the significance of signs. He draws an analogy with art, imagining a painting where the faces have uniform features, as is the case with masks at the Opéra: 'Je ne pourrois dis-je, comprendre, ce qui engage tel personnage à lever le bras, tel autre à avoir la main à la garde de son sabre; il me seroit impossible de discerner le sentiment qui fait lever la tête et les bras à celui-ci, et reculer celui-là' (p. 98). The face, therefore, acts as the 'brain' behind bodily movements and has an explanatory function for every gesture. It is the centre of a network, 'la partie de nous-même où toute l'expression se rassemble' (p. 112). His point is that a blank, silent face or one covered with a mask drastically hinders the signification process.

Noverre argues vehemently for the removal of masks at the Opéra. In his day, dancers tended to wear masks because they were required to represent mythological creatures and their masks had a fittingly dehumanising effect. But Noverre finds it absurd that precisely those who are deprived of the use of their voice should cover their faces. A 'plâtre mal dessiné et enluminé de la maniere la plus désagréable', it is already modelled and thus has a definitive shape: 'Parviendra-t-il à répandre sur un seul de ces visages artificiels les caractères innombrables des passions? lui sera-t-il possible de changer la forme que le moule aura imprimé à son masque?' (p. 99). According to Noverre, the mask-maker can easily make hideous masks, for extremes of expression are easy. His rendering is cold and immobile, unable to capture the nuances and subtleties of the face:

Il ne peut saisir les finesses des traits, et toutes les nuances imperceptibles, qui *groupant*, pour ainsi dire, la physionomie, lui prêtent mille formes différentes, quel est le *modeleur* qui puisse entreprendre de rendre les passions dans toutes leurs dégradations? Cette variété

immense qui échappe quelquefois à la peinture, et qui est la pierre de touche du grand peintre, peut-elle être vendue avec fidélité par un faiseur de masques? (p. 99).

Instead of masks, dancers' faces should be subtly painted 'par le secours de quelques teintes légères et de quelques coups de pinceau distribués avec art' (p. 103).

Noverre requires the dance master to teach in the same manner as the artist. He relates how the trainee artist starts by drawing an oval, then proceeds to the different parts of the face and then practises other parts of the body. Then he creates an ensemble and learns 'la manière de distribuer avec art ces coups de crayon qui donnent la vie, et qui impriment sur la physionomie les passions et les affections dont l'âme est pénétrée' (p. 118). Clearly Noverre does not see outline as being expressive as Le Brun does, but rather finds it in the touches which flesh out the face and give it colour and life. But Noverre uses Le Brun rather like contemporary artists do. In another letter he recommends that the dancer consult Le Brun's battle scenes from his *Life of Alexander* series. Le Brun is useful for he provides static models of expression from which to learn. And yet the dancer, just as much as the artist, is required to bring these faces to life.

Like the artist with his pupils, the dance master, after teaching the rudiments of dance, the steps and bodily conformations, should show how the face can be used to maximise expression. As with art, the passions are conceived in terms of simultaneity, multiplicity and nuance: 'Il ne seroit pas suffisant de lui faire peindre ces mêmes passions dans toute leur force; il faudroit encore qu'il lui enseignât la succession de leurs mouvemens, leurs gradations, leurs dégradations, et les différens effets qu'elles produisent sur les traits' (p. 118). The expression of the passions does not consist in the clear depiction of a single isolated entity: it is a process or progress through successive passions. It is less a case of the stopping points than the movement in between, and the actor's art is to show this movement as a smooth and even transition. Whereas in art, a fixed moment has to give the suggestion of many nuances of passion, the mobile actor or dancer must treat each passion evenly and in turn.

The prominence given to facial expression by Noverre is endorsed by another major exponent of pantomime, Johann Jakob Engel, whose *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1785-86) was translated into French in 1788-89 as *Idées sur le geste et l'action théâtrale*. Engel outlines in his sixth letter a hierarchy of expressive regions of the body. The face is the most expressive part, its features being ranked in the following order: eyes, eyebrows, forehead, mouth and nose. After these come the whole head, the neck, the hands, the shoulders, the feet and finally the whole body.

It has been suggested that, with the revival of pantomime and gestural styles of acting, the face featured much less in performance than the rest of the body.[39] But, on the contrary, the most ardent advocates of pantomime strongly emphasise facial expression in conjunction with bodily expression. Engel's hierarchy suggests that the face is the most expressive part of the body, and Noverre suggests that pantomime involves a crucial interplay between face and body, with the face actually functioning as a decoding mechanism for the rest of the body and as an intermediary between body and soul.

MISE EN SCÈNE

It has been seen just how prominent a role the actor's face had in eighteenth-century acting and how important it was to communicate the various shades of the passions to the audience. But how effective was this communication in practice? Accounts of acting conditions reveal a striking discrepancy between an aesthetic ideal and a technical actuality. The inadequacies of lighting in the theatre made the actor's task much harder. Moreover, actors themselves, through their injudicious use of costume and make-up, had a detrimental effect on their own performance.

Accounts of theatre lighting in the eighteenth century reveal it to be overwhelmingly unsatisfactory and lighting of the actor's face in particular proved enduringly problematic.[40] Though critics and theorists are united on the importance of depicting the face in brightness and clarity, in practice this proved to be an elusive ideal. Lavoisier's *Mémoire sur la meilleure manière d'éclairer une salle de spectacle*, delivered to the Paris Académie des Sciences in 1781, is a lucid analysis of both the aesthetic and the technical aspects of lighting. It takes stock of current theatre practice, pointing out its deficiencies and suggesting improvements. Some of the technical innovations, such as the extensive use of reflectors, stem from a project for street-lighting which Lavoisier developed in the 1750s.

Amongst the problems of contemporary theatres, Lavoisier highlights both the lack of lighting and also its poor quality. Improvements have been made since Louis XIV's day: tallow candles which create soot have largely been replaced by wax candles and oil lamps; the many cumbersome chandeliers which used to block the spectators' view have been removed and replaced by a single centrally-placed one, and by brighter footlights. But there are substantial areas of darkness, especially the back of the stage, the auditorium and within some boxes, which makes it difficult to recognise people, let alone to read their faces. At this point, Lavoisier does not distinguish between the faces of the actors and the audience, which is unsurprising given the expectations of theatre-goers who could well have been more interested in the intrigue of the auditorium than what was unfolding on-

stage. What is more, he argues that the brighter footlights actually hinder vision because they dazzle the spectator. And yet typically, stage action takes place down stage, close to the footlights, because the back of the stage is so dark. Such problems are highlighted by Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni in her letter to Diderot:

> C'est que dans une scène intéressante, le visage ajoute à l'expression; qu'il est des occasions où un regard, un mouvement de tête peu marqué fait beaucoup; ou un souris fait sentir qu'on se moque de celui qu'on écoute, ou qu'on trompe celui auquel on parle; que les yeux levés ou baissés marquent mille choses; et qu'à trois pieds des lampes un acteur n'a plus de visage.[41]

The importance of facial expression is clear from Riccoboni's description, but she maintains that the face cannot be used to its full effect because technology cannot keep up with aesthetics.

Lavoisier's innovative lighting project proposes developments in three areas: the theatre, the actor and the spectator. The actor is the most important:

> C'est lui qui anime la scène, c'est par lui que le sentiment passe dans l'âme du spectateur; le moindre mouvement, la moindre altération des traits, tout doit être senti; rien ne doit échapper, et personne n'ignore que ce sont des détails qui constituent la perfection du jeu, que c'est d'eux que résultent l'intérêt de la scène et souvent le succès des pièces.[42]

Lavoisier here fuses technology and art: the actor's performance brightens up the theatre and fills the soul of the spectator like the spreading of light. Once again the importance of picking up the subtle visual details of the actor's performance is stressed.

Lavoisier addresses the problem of footlights which dazzle the spectator by suggesting that they should be screened off with a reflective material. He recognises that the light from below distorts the actors' faces and that it is unnatural because it reverses light and shade. But he rejects a possible solution which is to have lighting from above and from the sides, which would lead to the most displeasing physical effects: the lights 'produiraient le plus désagréable de tous les effets, celui de projeter l'ombre du nez sur le bas du visage, d'ombrer trop fortement toute la cavité de l'orbite de l'oeil, de faire ressortir d'une manière choquante les moindres rides, les moindres inégalités de la peau (p. 97).

Lavoisier's great innovation is to suggest that actors should be lit from the front using spotlights. This would allow for the most effective and naturalistic lighting of the face, removing shadows and revealing the face in all its complexity. He reasons that actors do not need to see the audience and so it does not matter if they are dazzled by bright lights facing them. However, his innovation could only be fully realised with the invention of the Argand lamp in the early nineteenth century, and later with gas lamps.

Theatre make-up in the eighteenth century was not seen as an aid to characterisation as it is today. On the contrary, it was usually applied in similar fashion by all actors, regardless of the roles they were playing. Both actors and actresses wore powdered wigs, white face powder, spots of rouge on the cheeks, and mouths were shaped into cupids' bows. In short, it was not markedly different from the make-up of the street except that it was probably applied more liberally. The practice of applying flour to the face — *s'enfariner* — had almost died out, though it may have been used in the *théâtres de la foire* and for lower forms of comedy.[43]

Just as Cochin criticised the excessive use of make-up in society and satirised the fashions of his time in his 'Avis aux dames', theatre commentators also rebuked the excesses of actors. The word *fard* had strong negative connotations, suggesting the thick piling on of deception. The advocates of a more naturalistic style of acting also argued that the face should be seen in its true colours. Powder and rouge masked the hue and contours of the face, and wigs hid the shape of the head. Chamfort and La Porte in the entry 'Masque' of their *Dictionnaire dramatique* (1776) highlight this situation, quoting almost verbatim from Du Bos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*:

> Nous souffrons bien, il est vrai, que nos Comédiens nous cachent aujourd'hui la moitié des signes des passions qui peuvent être marqués sur le visage. Ces signes consistent autant dans les altérations qui surviennent à la couleur du visage, que dans les altérations qui surviennent à ses traits. Or le rouge qui est à la mode depuis cinquante ans, & que les hommes même mettent avant que de monter sur le Théâtre, nous empêche d'appercevoir les changements de couleur, qui, dans la nature, font une si grande impression sur nous (II, 188).

Make-up is therefore a hindrance to the clear depiction of the passions: powder deadens the face by creating an impassive mask. Chamfort and La Porte are also keenly aware of the colour of the passions, something which recalls the reinstatement of colour in the discourse on painting.

The uniform nature of theatre make-up also meant that distinctions of gender and rank were obscured: thus a queen and a milkmaid would appear similarly painted.[44] This uniformity was also considered undesirable by theatre commentators and is similar to criticisms of painting. Not only did this mean that roles were not individuated; there were also problems of visual identification. It should also be remembered that theatre costumes did little to express character as they were largely more ornate versions of street fashions. Besides, as actors provided their own costumes, theatre dress could easily become a matter of rivalry between actors. Clairon reflects in her memoirs that French decorum restricts naturalism in costume: in contrast to England, Richard III may not be played with a real hunchback. Even Clairon's and Lekain's reforms in the 1750s which sought a greater historical veracity in

costume and scenery did little to advance the notion of costume to enhance the individual role. All this suggests that make-up and costume were more a hindrance than a help in the portrayal of character and the passions. As a result, extra emphasis must have been placed on the face and voice, both to convey emotions and to depict character. Once again, the aesthetic ideal appears somewhat removed from actual theatre practice.

Some stands were made, however. In her memoirs, Clairon is critical of the make-up of her day. Her objection to the use of face powder is physiological as well as aesthetic:

L'usage du blanc est aujourd'hui presque général sur tous les théâtres. Cet éclat emprunté dont personne n'est la dupe, et contre lequel tous les gens de goût murmurent, grossit et jaunit la peau, éteint et cercle les yeux, absorbe la physionomie, fait disparaître la précieuse mobilité des muscles, et met continuellement ce qu'on entend en contradiction avec ce qu'on voit [...] La terreur, la suffocation de la rage, les éclats de la colère, les cris du déséspoir peuvent-ils s'accorder avec un visage plâtré, sur lequel rien ne se peut peindre? (pp. 264-65).

Here the image of a plaster cast suggests a trapped living face under caked layers of powder. She goes so far as to say that she would prefer to see the return of Classical masks rather than an excess of powder. If this were to happen, she argues, at least actors would spend less time decorating their faces and would consequently devote more time to their delivery of lines.

Clairon then describes how she used to apply make-up when she was a performer. Essentially she aimed to highlight and enhance the key features, to bring out the natural by means of a few artistic touches:

J'adoucissais ou noircissais mes sourcils d'après le caractere que mon rôle exigeait: avec des poudres de differentes couleurs je fesais la même chose à mes cheveux; mais loin de cacher les ressorts qui font mouvoir la physionomie, j'avais fait une étude particulière de l'anatomie de la tête pour les mettre plus facilement en valeur (p. 267-68).

Despite the prevalence of masks in society, their use in the theatre, even at the Comédie Italienne, had all but died out by the middle of the century. Noverre's impassioned plea in 1760 for the removal of dancers' masks is more understandable if it is recognised that he was trying to bring dance more into line with current theatre practice. In fact he had some success with his campaign, for the principal dancers at the Opéra ceased to use masks by the mid-1770s, although the *corps de ballet* still wore them.

The discourse on masks in eighteenth-century theatre commonly drew a contrast with Ancient theatre. Theatre commentators acknowledged that the Greeks and Romans used masks to combat distance because of their vast amphitheatres, but they found their masks to be crude and alien to modern performance practices. Pierre Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, in *De l'Art du théâtre* (1769), describes Classical masks which covered the whole head, leaving only the eyes visible, and which represented either a single dominant passion or a

character type. Some masks were literally two-faced, having two profiles depicting contrasting passions such as joy and sadness which the actor would turn towards the audience at the appropriate moment. Nougaret contrasts this state of affairs with the present day: 'Actuellement il faut que ce soit le visage même du Comédien qui peigne les passions dont il est agité'.[45]

From an eighteenth-century perspective, these masks were seen to inhibit the actor. The passions they depicted were seen as exaggerated and their static nature was considered to be unsuited to multiple characterisation and a variety of expressions. The mask, therefore, assumed the significance of a clumsy imitation or *charge*. Also, the modern theatrical aesthetic rested on a notion of transparency, for the actor was required to lay bare his soul to the audience. But the mask represented a barrier to this form of representation. This is why Marmontel, in his *Encyclopédie* entry 'Déclamation théâtrale', expresses his dismay at the mask-wearing of the Ancients:

> Sur les théâtres de Rome & d'Athènes l'expression du visage étoit interdite aux comédiens pour l'usage des masques; & quel charme de moins dans leur déclamation! Pour concevoir comment un usage qui parmi nous paraît si choquant dans le genre noble & pathétique a pu jamais s'établir chez les anciens, il faut supposer qu'à la faveur de l'étendue, la dissonance monstrueuse de ces traits fixés & inanimés avec une action vive & une succession rapide des sentimens souvent opposes, échappoit aux yeux des spectateurs (IV, 680).

He considers that Ancient theatre lacks the subtlety of modern theatre, seeing a 'dissonance monstrueuse' between its static masks and the plurality and successivity of the passions which are the essence of modern theatre. He finds this particularly shocking in the case of the tragic actor. He sees the vastness of Classical amphitheatres as a hindrance, and implies that the relative intimacy of the modern theatre is eminently suited to the nuances of physiognomical play.[46]

It is clear that, in eighteenth-century theatre, the mask is a metaphor for what is undesirable in performance: exaggeration, stasis, restriction and concealment. This is evident in Touron's manual for young actors which uses the mask to illustrate a constrained and mannered form of acting:

> Dans toute imitation, il faut se gêner, se contraindre & quelquefois même s'efforcer; or, dans tout ce qui est contraint, il ne peut y avoir de graces réelles, de bienséances, d'harmonie; dès-lors plus de vérité. C'est l'effet d'un beau masque, il est beau; mais les contours en sont durs, il n'est pas animé, ce n'est qu'une charge de la Nature; ou disons mieux, c'est l'effet d'un portrait, d'une tête bien coloriée, dont les rides du front exprimeroient le mépris, les yeux la langueur & la bouche le rire: on sent bien que ce n'est pas là la force de la persuasion, & moins encore celle de l'illusion.[47]

It is precisely the actor's fixity, the hard contours of his expression which creates an impression of falsity and manner. Such an observation is similar to the criticisms made of fashionable contemporary portraits with their frozen smirk. In both painting and acting, suppleness and fluidity were considered

desirable and fixed, and hard contours were seen as *maniérés*, and this is also why Le Brun's 'masks' were considered mannered.

Some writers recognised the value of masks, if only from a technical point of view. Servandoni d'Hannetaire argues that masks cover up physical discrepancies between the actor and the role: hence young parts can be played by old actors without offending *vraisemblance*.[48] Masks also gave a certain anonymity to the actor. Mercier, in *Du Théâtre, ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique*, reacts against the current personality cult of the actor by claiming that without masks it is impossible to forget the actor: being confronted with Lekain, Molé or Brizard rather than an anonymous mask means that illusion is never created.

Genre, Rank, Character

In eighteenth-century French dramatic theory, the genres were distinguished according to the type and strength of the passions they represented: tragedy was the place where a few strong or 'heroic' passions were represented, whereas comedy was the place of many moderate passions. This idea came from Quintilian's assertion that the difference between *ethos* (associated with comedy) and *pathos* (associated with tragedy) was one of degree not nature. A variation on this view in the eighteenth century was that tragedy represented the passions, whereas comedy depicted character, a concept which was derived from Aristotle's earlier assertion that *pathos* encompassed the fleeting passions and *ethos* involved the more permanent characteristics.[49] It has already been seen in several contexts that passions and characters were often indistinguishable from one another in the domain of nuance and moderation, and comedy seems to be similarly marked by this merging of passions and characters.

Rémond de Sainte Albine describes tragedy as consisting of 'un certain nombre de passions favorites' whereas comedy consists of all the passions.[50] He claims that two different styles are required, comedy which shows succession and tragedy which shows strength:

> Si, en jouant la Comédie, il importe de faire succéder dans son âme plus de différentes impressions, il est essentiel, en jouant la Tragédie, d'éprouver plus fortement chacune des impressions qu'on est obligé d'exprimer. Chez l'Acteur Comique il faut que le *Sentiment* soit un instrument plus universel. Chez l'Acteur Tragique, il faut qu'il soit plus mâle, & capable de produire de plus grands effets (p. 37).

Here Sainte Albine argues the opposite view to Diderot concerning the actor's technique, for he suggests that the actor should actually experience the passions passing through the soul. Mercier comments in the same vein on the nature of comedy and tragedy: 'Et toutefois, autant le caractere de la Tragédie doit être ferme & invariable, autant la Comédie exige-t-elle des nuances

mobiles & changeantes' (p. 73). A parallel may be drawn here between the aesthetics of Le Brun and Watelet. Le Brun's passions, it has been seen, are heroic, 'male', tending towards extremes and restricted in number, and hence they seem to correspond to the tragic passions. Watelet's passions, on the other hand, are multiple and varied, nuanced and rapid, and reflect more closely the comic passions.

In some respects tragedy is undermined by a comic aesthetic. Riccoboni argues that comedy contains all the elements of tragedy and more besides:

> Toutes les passions, toutes les situations lui sont propres, & le sentiment y peut être porté au plus haut degré. La Comédie a souvent des personnages nobles, il est chez elle des instans où la majesté même est nécessaire. La seule différence que l'on puisse mettre entre l'un et l'autre genre, c'est que la Comédie parcourt tous les tons, & que la Tragédie se restreint à un tout petit nombre.[51]

Notwithstanding Riccoboni's loyalties to the Comédie Italienne, this is a serious charge against tragedy. Moreover, comic acting is judged to be a more difficult art than that of the tragic actor. Rémond de Sainte Albine claims that the comic actor will be more severely judged by his audience because he represents the passions with which they themselves are familiar. Servandoni d'Hannetaire uses a different argument: 'Les caractères ne sont-ils plus variés & les contrastes plus opposés dans celui-ci [comedy] que dans celui-là [tragedy]? Peut-être est-il moins facile d'imiter la nature que de l'outrer; & moins difficile de faire rire, que de faire pleurer'.[52] The middle ground which is the domain of comedy is therefore considered harder to conquer than the extremes of tragedy. This argument recalls Caylus's emphasis on the middle ground of the *passions douces*, away from any kind of *charge* or extreme. There is also a strong parallel with his view that drawing from the subtleties of nature is both more difficult and more rewarding than drawing from imaginary extremes.

The present account does not subscribe to the threadbare opinion that the eighteenth century sees the decline of tragedy; however, in certain respects, in the middle years of the century the tragic aesthetic was undermined by a richer comic one. In comparison with comedy, tragedy was seen as extreme verging on the *charge*, depicting a limited number of passions and therefore lacking in nuance and movement. Comedy, on the other hand, explored all the depths of nuance and the mixed region of passions and characters. A Le Brunian aesthetic was therefore partially, but not totally, undermined by that of Watelet.

But the aesthetics of the moderate were most fully exploited not in comedy but in the *drame*, or the *genre sérieux*.[53] Promoted chiefly by Diderot and Beaumarchais, the *drame* sought to avoid the extremes of both tragedy and comedy because they were 'unnatural', and instead it strove to represent the

passions of everyday life, by implication those of the bourgeoisie. Beaumarchais comments on Classical tragedy: 'Tout est énorme dans ces Drames: les passions toujours effrénées, les crimes toujours atroces, y sont aussi loin de la nature qu'inouis dans nos moeurs'.[54] Moreover, comedy, he claims, does not teach us to love the good man but instead to prefer the *fripon*. Diderot locates the *genre sérieux* at the centre of an even broader spectrum, encompassing 'Le burlesque... Le genre comique... Le genre sérieux... Le genre tragique... Le merveilleux'.[55] Unlike Caylus, he does not suggest that the passions themselves should be soft; instead he argues that strong passions may be revealed in a moderate setting. Caylus appears to do the reverse, accommodating the moderate passions into the sphere of history painting.

* * *

Tragedy, although it represented powerful human beings, was not concerned specifically with character, since its principal object was to show heroes and heroines destabilised by passions or events beyond their control. In comedy, however, character was often the organising principle, with the action being constructed around the personality of a particular figure. A type of comedy which was popular in the eighteenth century was known as the *comédie de caractère*. In this context, character was understood to mean a single salient trait such as jealousy or ambition. Commonly this trait was a vice or defect which was 'corrected' during the course of the play. Molière had perfected this comic form and he had many imitators in the following century. But inevitably these general characters or types were limited in number and range, and this led to the anxiety among playwrights and critics that comedy was fast running out of possibilities. Destouches, in his preface to *Le Glorieux* (1732), maintains that he still has a stock of new characters to write about, but he is aware of the increasing difficulty of being original: 'Quoique les caractères semblent épuisés, il m'en reste encore plusieurs à traiter. Ce n'est pas que je ne sois très convaincu des difficultés et des périls de l'entreprise, parce que les caractères les plus faciles et les plus saillants ont déjà paru sur la scène'.[56]

A new definition of character was established by Beaumarchais in his plays and theoretical works.[57] Instead of one overriding characteristic, Beaumarchais envisaged character as composed of many parts, and saw the individual as a unique collection of diverse and sometimes contradictory elements. The most searching investigation of this subject is Figaro's monologue in Act V scene 3 of *Le Mariage de Figaro*. Figaro finds his identity perplexing: he has had no choice over the 'Bizarre suite d'événements' which his life comprises.[58] He calls into question the traditional theory of comic character as organised around a salient trait, for in this moment of extreme

self-doubt, he wonders whether the 'gaité' which his character has displayed throughout the rest of the play is really a fundamental part of him: 'Je dis ma gaité sans savoir si elle est à moi plus que le reste'. Above all he is struck by the difficulty of knowing what really constitutes his 'moi', seeing himself as 'Un assemblage informe de parties inconnues', and all his previous actions as a succession of roles which have now disintegrated and which seem no longer to constitute his being.[59]

For Beaumarchais, character was not confined to comedy, but was also central to his reflections on the *drame*. In his *Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux* (1767), which is also the preface to his play *Eugénie*, he identifies character as central to his drama. This is in contrast to Diderot, whose *drames* were based first and foremost on situations. Diderot believed that drama arose from the conflict between character and situation and was strongly opposed to the worn-out formula of contrasting characters.[60] But despite their differing strategies, Diderot and Beaumarchais share a conception of the variable and arbitrary nature of human identity. What Figaro sees as his role-playing, moving in succession from one position to another, 'maître ici, valet là', is not dissimilar to Diderot's 'cent physionomies diverses'.[61] Of course, there is a strong social dimension to Figaro's speech: he is obliged because of his lowly rank to live by his wits and constantly remain mobile, but Beaumarchais, like Diderot, seems also to be saying that this is what it is to be human: the richness of character lies in its manifold, shifting and often unfathomable nature.

Both Diderot and Beaumarchais make a distinction between *caractère* and *condition*, or social rank, and thereby they crucially separate individual psychology and social identity. Diderot argues in the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* that it is *condition* rather than *caractère* which should be represented by the new genre.[62] He believed that it was through the depiction of social types, such as the 'père de famille', that one could appeal to a common humanity: the audience would identify more strongly with these social types than with individual characters which might have wholly different motivations from their own. But the depiction of *condition* provided a shared identity, bound individuals together and gave them a sense of their civic duty.

Beaumarchais's argument is somewhat different, for he claims that social rank is secondary to character and can even be independent from it. He states in his *Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux*: 'Tout homme est lui-même par son caractère; il est ce qu'il plaît au sort par son état, sur lequel le caractère influe beaucoup'.[63] *Caractère* for Beaumarchais seems to represent something dynamic, almost a capacity to transcend one's rank. He shows a basic incongruity between character and *condition* in the form of characters such as the Comte Almaviva who abuses his social position and authority and is thoroughly 'ignoble' in his behaviour. Through his portrayal of Figaro, he

implies that all social types are worthy of frank and nuanced depiction, not just the nobility. But despite their different dramatic strategies, Beaumarchais and Diderot have a common starting point, namely the vagaries of the individual. Diderot suggests that the portrayal of the infinite variability of human beings in drama is actually socially divisive since it emphasises difference rather than unity. He is also plagued by the amorality of his materialist vision of human nature and, as it were, takes refuge in the moral purpose of collective social roles. But Beaumarchais, more radical than Diderot on this point, suggests that human variability is the essence of good drama and a creative spur to the dramatist.

In their theories of the *drame*, both Diderot and Beaumarchais question the implicit link between character, social rank and genre which had been fundamental to drama and art for centuries (the assumption that tragedy and history painting represented kings and that comedy and genre represented the lower orders). As such they undermine the principle of decorum in aesthetic as well as social terms. Félibien had implied that expression was governed by distinctions which were physiological as well as social, and that there was no disparity between outer role and inner being. Watelet had confounded this fundamental relationship by arguing that the common people were actually more expressive than the nobility, and that social masks were a barrier to true expression. This posed irreparable problems for signification: art no longer consisted of clear messages, of the representation of what is most typical, and surface was no longer necessarily true to essence. A finite number of explicit models was replaced by multiples with a more indeterminate status. The demise of decorum meant that character no longer consisted of what was most typical or obvious about a person: instead, the essence of a person was thought to be found in his or her uncertainty and unpredictability.

An increasing resistance to the tightly interlocking concepts of genre, rank and individual identity, which had hitherto dominated the arts, may be observed in other sources. The *Encyclopédie* entry 'Caractère' suggests that people are made up of an infinite number of variables, not just social rank: 'Trois genres différens de circonstances concourent à modifier le caractère. D'abord la nation et le siècle; ensuite l'âge, la manière de vivre et le rang; enfin le génie, le tempérament, en un mot l'individuel'.[64] This quotation elaborates on the old categorisation of character according to sex, age and rank: whilst retaining the ternary structure, it attributes many other factors to the formation of character, finishing almost triumphantly on the word 'individuel'. The suggestion here, rather like in Beaumarchais, is that many factors contribute to a person's make-up and it is this unique configuration of particularities which makes up the individual. The word 'individuel' also

suggests that there is something elusive about human nature, something which cannot be grasped by placing a person in various categories.

A split between general forms and individual details, similar to the *condition/caractère* distinction, is also apparent elsewhere. The *Encyclopédie* identifies two different forms of character: 'Il ne suffit pas même que chaque sentiment, chaque discours, chaque action ait une vérité générale de *caractère*, il faut encore que tout ait la nuance précise qui répond aux modifications individuelles du personnage; car nul homme n'a simplement le *caractère* général d'un certain genre'.[65] Watelet's *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1788) also makes a distinction between *caractère général* and *caractère particulier*, the former being the crude lines of demarcation between one object and another, and the latter being the finer distinctions.[66] The discussion revolves around the artist's judicious use of detail to enhance but not to detract from the subject matter. The suggestion is that one is both type and individual, *caractère* and *condition*.

Facial expression, therefore, had a key role in eighteenth-century performance. Facial aesthetics, as in painting, were governed by principles of rapidity, multiplicity, nuance and the controlled progression through the *gamme* of the passions. Actors were encouraged to enhance their skills through exercise and the study of painting and anatomy. Maximising expression was seen as desirable, and an aesthetics of explicitness like that of Caylus developed in some quarters. The mask embodied all that was undesirable in performance because it was seen to conceal and restrict. In pantomime performance there was a move away from this literal approach and rapid facial movement was thought to contribute to theatrical illusion. Also the face in pantomime performance was thought to have a vital co-ordinating function for bodily expression. The importance accorded to the face at this time is paradoxical, given the stage conditions: lighting was inadequate, make-up and costume concealed the actor, and opera glasses were in their infancy. Finally, the conception of the role of passions and character in relation to theatrical genres has some important parallels with painting. Character in the theatre shifts from a limited number of general types to a conception of character as multiple, dynamic and shifting.

NOTES

1. See Xavier de Courville, 'Jeu italien contre jeu français', *CAIEF*, 15 (1963), 189-99.
2. See Martine de Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1988), p. 120.

3. There were of course exceptions to these rules: Racine's Bérénice sinks into a chair (V, 5) and Atalide (*Bajazet*, IV, 3) and Esther (II, 7) swoon on stage. See David Maskell, *Racine: A Theatrical Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
4. Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (London/Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985); Angelica Goodden, *Actio and Persuasion: Dramatic Performance in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). Roach argues that developments in the physical sciences in the eighteenth century allowed acting theory for the first time to separate itself from the rhetorical tradition. Goodden argues on the contrary that the eighteenth century sees the development of 'actio' or bodily eloquence. The present argument is closer to Roach's: whilst rhetorical modes of acting persisted, pantomime seeks a non-rhetorical form of eloquence in the form of natural language.
5. See Marc Fumaroli, 'Le Corps éloquent: une somme d'*actio* et *pronunciatio rhetorica* au XVIIème siècle: les "Vacationes autumnales" du P. Louis de Cressolles (1620)', and Martine de Rougemont, 'L'Acteur et l'orateur: étapes d'un débat', both in *Dix-septième siècle*, 132 (1981), 237-64, 329-33.
6. See Samuel S. Taylor, 'Le Geste chez les "maîtres" italiens de Molière', *Dix-septième siècle*, 132 (1981), 285-301.
7. *The Actor, or A Treatise on the Art of Playing*, 2nd edn (London, 1755; repr. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), pp. 74-75.
8. Letter of 27 November 1758, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Roger Lewinter, 15 vols (Paris: Club français du livre, 1969), III, 674.
9. Ibid., p. 677.
10. Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of Eighteenth-Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987).
11. English acting styles of the period have been much more closely analysed than French ones especially in relation to the visual arts. See Lily B. Campbell, 'The Rise of a Theory of Stage Presentation in England during the Eighteenth Century', *PMLA*, 32 (1917), 163-200; Alan S. Downer, 'Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth-Century Acting', *PMLA*, 58 (1943), 1002-37; Alan Hughes, 'Art and Eighteenth-Century Acting Style', *Theatre Notebook*, 41 (1987), 24-31, 79-89, 128-39; Brewster Rogerson, 'The Art of Painting the Passions', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14 (1953), 68-94; Alastair Smart, 'Dramatic Gesture and Expression in the Age of Hogarth and Reynolds', *Apollo*, 82 (1965), 90-97.
12. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols (Paris, 1751-65), IV (1754), 680-85; *Mémoires de Mlle Clairon* (Paris, 1822), p. 269. Subsequent page references are from this edition.
13. See Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on some Trends of Theatrical Fashion 1770-1815* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1967), chapter 1.
14. *Appel à toutes les nations d'Europe*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 52 vols (Paris: Garnier, 1873-85), XXIV, 219.
15. See Jean-Jacques Olivier, *Voltaire et les comédiens interprètes de son théâtre* (Paris: Société française d'Imprimerie et de Librairie, 1900), p. 110.
16. Roach (p. 42) draws attention to these dramatic contrasts.
17. See Michelle de Montalbetti, 'La Déclamation théâtrale en France au XVIIIe siècle' (unpublished diploma [DES] dissertation, Institut des études théâtrales, Université de Paris III, 1965).
18. See André Blanc, 'L'Action à la Comédie Française au XVIIIe siècle', *Dix-septième siècle*, 132 (1981), 319-27 (p. 326).
19. Michael Fried's arguments about painting are therefore equally relevant to developments in the theatre in the mid-eighteenth century: *Absorption and Theatricality: Genre and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1980).
20. Concerning tradition and practice at the Comédie Italienne, see Gustave Attinger, *L'Esprit de la Commedia dell'arte dans le théâtre français* (Neuchâtel: Librairie Théâtrale, 1950); Patrice Pavis, *Marivaux à l'épreuve de la scène* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986).
21. Pierre Larthomas comments on the varied repertoire of the Italiens which ranged from farce to the 'comédies les plus fines de Marivaux'. *Le Théâtre en France au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), p. 14.
22. Evarariste Gherardi abandoned the mask at this time. See Constant Mic, *La Commedia dell'arte, ou Le Théâtre des comédiens italiens des XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1980), p. 120.
23. Attinger, p. 336.
24. Mic, p.120. Pavis (p. 41) argues that the eventual shedding of Arlequin's mask causes the demise of his highly symbolic character.

25. See Theodor Ziolkowski, 'Language and Mimetic Action in Lessing's "Miss Sara Sampson"', *Germanic Review*, 40 (1965), 261-76.
26. *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1988), pp. 101-02.
27. A thorough survey of Garrick's face in contemporary English criticism is given in Bertram Joseph, *The Tragic Actor* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), pp. 108-16.
28. See Frank A Hedgcock, *A Cosmopolitan Actor: David Garrick and his French Friends* (London: Stanley Paul, 1912).
29. *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, p. 328.
30. As Marian Hobson has pointed out, Diderot's view of Garrick's technique undergoes a transformation for, in the Salon de 1765, Garrick is described as 'commandant ... à son âme, qui prend la passion qu'il veut', which suggests that he feels. Despite these different opinions on how Garrick achieves his effects, contemporary accounts describe in strikingly similar fashion what these effects are. Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 202; *Salon de 1765*. in *Salons*, ed. by Jean Seznec, 2nd edn, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983), II, 213.
31. Hobson's discussion of the actor's technique (pp. 203-05) introduces the further dimension of the audience's reactions and the actor's reaction to these.
32. *Salons*, III, 63.
33. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister etc.*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (1877-82), VI, 319-20.
34. *Réflexions morales, politiques, et littéraires, sur le théâtre*, 20 vols (Avignon, 1763-66), V, 124.
35. Both anecdotes are related in Servandoni d'Hannetaire, *Observations sur l'art du comédien et sur d'autres objets concernant cette profession en général*, 2nd edn (n.p., 1774), pp. 140-41. The second is also found in the introduction to Clairon's *Mémoires* (p. lxxii).
36. *Correspondance littéraire*, VI, 318-19.
37. See Roland Virolle, 'Noverre, Garrick, Diderot: Pantomime et littérature', in *Motifs et figures* (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), 201-14.
38. *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*, 4 vols (St. Petersburg, 1803), I, 97. All subsequent quotations are from volume I.
39. De Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale*, p. 121. Dorothy Johnson argues a similar case for painting: 'Corporality and Communication: The Gestural Revolution of Diderot, David and the "Oath of the Horatii"', *Art Bulletin*, 71 (1989), 92-113.
40. The definitive study of lighting in French theatres in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Gösta M. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 1977).
41. In Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, III, 672.
42. A. L. Lavoisier, *Œuvres*, 6 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1862-93), III, 95.
43. See Georges Doutrepont 'Les Acteurs masqués et enfarinés du XVIème au XVIIIème siècle en France', *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, 24/2 (1928).
44. See Pierre Peyronnet, *La Mise en scène au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1974), pp. 70-71.
45. *De l'Art du théâtre où il est parlé des différens genres de spectacles et de la musique adaptée au théâtre*, 2 vols (Paris, 1769), I, 346.
46. Some commentators interpreted the intimacy of the modern theatre in negative terms. In his *Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe* (1761), Voltaire suggests that small stages and auditoria have long inhibited the raw passions of tragic action, and behind his arguments lies the desire to resurrect the grand scale of the art of the Ancients. Such a view also constituted the aesthetic reason for Voltaire and Lekain's notorious removal of the banquettes at the Comédie Française in 1759.
47. *L'Art du comédien vu dans ses principes* (Amsterdam/Paris, 1782), p. 35.
48. *Observations*, p. 199.
49. Shearer West's conclusions about passions and humours in the English theatre are particularly pertinent to the present discussion: *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (London: Pinter, 1991), chapters 4 and 5.
50. *Le Comédien*, p. 34.
51. *L'Art du théâtre*, p. 58.
52. *Observations*, p. 145. The same argument was used by Molière in scene 6 of his *Critique de 'L'école des femmes'*.
53. See Félix Gaiffe, *Le Drame en France au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1910).
54. *Essai sur le genre dramatique sérieux*, in *Théâtre complet*, 4 vols (Genève: Slatkine, 1967), I, 26.
55. *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, p. 137.

56. *Théâtre du dix-huitième siècle*, ed. by Jacques Truchet, 2 vols, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1972-74), I, 565.
57. See Henri Coulet, 'La Notion de caractère dans l'œuvre de Beaumarchais', *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, 11/3 (1978), 21-32 (p. 24).
58. *Théâtre complet*, III, 250.
59. Ibid., III, 251.
60. *De la poésie dramatique*, in *Œuvres esthétiques*, pp. 234-35.
61. *Salons*, III, 67.
62. *Œuvres esthétiques*, p. 153.
63. *Théâtre complet*, I, 33.
64. *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie* (Amsterdam, 1776-77), V (1776), 231.
65. Ibid., p. 231.
66. Article 'Caractère', *Encyclopédie méthodique, ou par ordre des matières; par une société de gens de lettres, de savans et d'artistes* (Paris, 1788), p. 92.

CHAPTER 8

LAVATER: THE CIRCLE OF CHARACTER

Lavater's *Fragments* are multi-faceted, looking simultaneously in many different directions.[1] Critics have tended to seize upon single aspects of the work without acknowledging the breadth and multiplicity of its standpoints. As a result, Lavater has been labelled ingenious and pernicious, liberal and reactionary, highbrow and lowbrow, cautious and dogmatic, a representative of the *Sturm und Drang* and of Neo-Classicism. In some measure, Lavater is all of these things and it is necessary to accept the plurality and diversity of his thinking rather than dwelling on its more obvious shortcomings. The 1782 *Correspondance littéraire* review of the first French edition of the *Fragments* likens them to a rambling edifice, still covered in scaffolding and surrounded by loose stone.[2] This image of 'work under construction' is a useful metaphor for exploring the text, as it shows that the *Fragments* should not be regarded as a single smooth façade. On the contrary, the review stresses that, had the work been more systematic, it would have been much less compelling.

The *Fragments* address some fundamental issues of contemporary thought: theories of knowledge; language and genius; the relationship between moral and physical beauty; the homogeneity of the human race; and much else besides. Lavater drew his methods and the terms of his arguments from a variety of disciplines, chiefly the natural sciences, theology and art. His engagement with current ideas and his ability to couch his opinions in specialist language guaranteed the *Fragments* popular success and even earned them respect among men and women of letters.[3] But amateurs and experts alike detected flaws in Lavater's reasoning.[4] Particularly problematic was his prediction that physiognomics would one day become a 'science', a discipline with a set of general rules and abstract principles backed up by a proven method of experimentation. At best, Lavater's physiognomy lacks intellectual rigour but is sustained by his ebullient personality and his religious conviction; at worst, Lavater is a charlatan and his work a pernicious incitement to the moral defamation of certain races, types and individuals. Such is the stance of Lichtenberg's devastating critique, *Über Physiognomik; wider die Physiognomen* (1778), which deftly pulls down the rambling edifice which Lavater has so painstakingly constructed.

But it is not the intention of this chapter to unpick the epistemological weaknesses in Lavater. More interesting is the patterning of his thought and his position in relation to other writers on physiognomy who have already been discussed. In many respects, Lavater marks the culmination of eighteenth-

century physiognomical thought and his *Fragments* are both the fullest exposition of the subject and its most influential vehicle. Yet in other ways, his work differs starkly from the patterns of physiognomical thought already encountered, a fact which cannot be accounted for solely in terms of Lavater's nationality. Lavater was a European phenomenon: his circle of acquaintances was wide and cosmopolitan, and his work quickly spread to all major parts of Europe. That said, my investigation of Lavater's physiognomy has a French slant to it and it is for this reason that the quotations are drawn from the first major French edition of his work.[5]

The *Fragments* bring together many of the strands of this book: the conditions of eighteenth-century physiognomy with particular relevance to France; the links between physiognomy and the visual arts; theories of character. In some respects, Lavater restates the theories of a particular physiognomical climate which have already been outlined. Yet he must also be seen as regressive, for the *Fragments* point backwards to those conditions and preoccupations which were dismissed in Chapter 1 as being irrelevant to the age. Lavater's work also represents a backlash against many aesthetic trends which have been outlined in previous chapters, and also theories of character which are closely linked to these trends. This stems largely from his privileging of *physiognomy* — the study of the fixed features — over *pathognomy* — the study of the moving facial parts. As a consequence, Lavater is examined here principally as a 'reactionary' rather than in terms of the novelty of his work.

THE GROWTH OF A PHYSIOGNOMICAL PROJECT

Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) lived and worked for most of his life in Zurich.[6] Ordained a Zwinglian minister, he produced a number of works of theology. His particular brand of religious thought emphasised a subjective, intuitive approach to God and often strayed into mysticism and the occult. Much of this thinking is set out in an early work of theology, *Aussichten in die Ewigkeit* (1768-73), which prefaces a good deal of his physiognomical thought. In practice, Lavater was a fervent evangelical and he acquired a reputation for his fanatical preaching. Like many clergymen of his day, he was also a man of letters. From early in his life he was involved with the Swiss nationalist movement and produced several works on this. Besides, he had considerable knowledge of art and aesthetics. He knew the work of the major theorists of the time, Hogarth, Burke, Baumgarten, Herder, Lessing, Hagedorn, and others.[7] He also benefited from personal contacts: Henry Fuseli (Heinrich Füßli) was born in Zurich in the same year as Lavater and trained with him as a minister; the theorist Johann Jacob Sulzer laid on a tour of the art exhibits of Berlin for his friend when he visited; Lavater was also personally acquainted

with Winckelmann and Chodowiecki. With all this, he considered his work on physiognomy a sideline, hence the disclaimer in his preface to the *Fragments* that his efforts are mere dabbling, an 'étude accessoire', secondary to his religious occupations.

Lavater's work on physiognomy began quite modestly as a lecture to the Zurich Society of Natural Sciences. This was printed by his friend Johann Georg Zimmermann in the *Hannoverisches Magazin* in 1772 in three instalments. A fuller edition, *Von der Physiognomik*, was published in 1772. Chiefly through the encouragement of Zimmermann, Lavater subsequently completed a much larger edition, the *Physiognomische Fragmente, zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* which was published in four volumes between 1775 and 1778. His work met with both enthusiasm and hostility all over Europe. The *Fragments* were rapidly translated into the major European languages, and new editions and derivations appeared for much of the nineteenth century.[8]

To a large extent, however, Lavater should be seen as the head of a collaborative project. His involvement grew perhaps despite himself, though it would be wrong to dismiss his powers as a publicist and populariser. It was chiefly due to the encouragement of Zimmermann that the project got under way. Goethe also provided practical and moral support, writing some passages of the *Fragments*, seeing to the details of publication and enthusing in his correspondence with Lavater about the science of physiognomy. Later Goethe famously distanced himself from the zealous Zurich pastor and his physiognomical projects.[9] On the artistic side, Lavater received much guidance from Fuseli, who worked on the engravings for the *Physiognomische Fragmente* and also generated an interest in Lavater's work in Britain. Though Le Brun's lecture on expression is not an organic whole, it remains in its conception the work of one man; the same cannot be said of the *Fragments* which from the outset are the result of multiple authorship.

The *Fragments* also collate a large amount of pre-existing but disparate material on physiognomy. In his introduction, Lavater purports to do away with previous sources on physiognomy, establishing a *tabula rasa* for clear physiognomical observation; and yet his debt to established scholarship is considerable in terms of both written and visual sources. It includes extracts from the Bible, Cicero, Montaigne (albeit selectively quoted), Bacon, Leibniz, Sulzer, Haller, Wolff, Gellert, Cureau de la Chambre and Herder. Elsewhere Pernety, Buffon and Winckelmann are cited extensively. A long section of the *Fragments* addresses Lichtenberg's objections to his project. On the visual side, illustrations from Le Brun's *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière*, and Parsons's *Human Physiognomy Explain'd* are used alongside plates after Chodowiecki. In addition, engravings after old masters, Raphael,

Poussin, Holbein, Van Dyck and many others are included, together with famous works of Classical sculpture. One cannot help thinking that the *Fragments* are something of a rag-bag of different sources, which leads to a work of great unevenness and contradiction.

Despite this impressive list of sources, Bougeant (or Pernetti) is not referred to, a fact which is surprising given the work's translation into German and also given Lavater's extensive network of literary contacts. One might have supposed him to have come into contact with the *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies* via Pernety who, it has been seen, was well integrated into Berlin aristocratic and intellectual circles and, if anecdote is to be believed, owed his entry into these circles to the reputation of his uncle Pernetti. Though he does not specifically acknowledge the existence or influence of the *Lettres*, we cannot be sure that Lavater was definitely unacquainted with the work. Indeed, the two writers have several points in common, as will be seen.

The cumulative aspect of the *Fragments*, and also their patchy nature, are fundamental, not just to its structure but to the whole physiognomical project. They stem both from Lavater's conception of physiognomy as a divine language and also from his understanding of human nature as imperfect. Influenced by both empiricism and natural religion, he saw God as symbolically present in the physical world. He argued that, like the scriptures, nature was a text to be read: its forms must be interpreted so as to achieve knowledge of the divinity. Hence physiognomy, for Lavater, was God's language, a universal, non-verbal language. In contrast, human language was but a fragment, a mere set of arbitrary signs. Inherent in Lavater's thinking is the perennial theme of the scattering of the original language after Babel, and its fragmentation to form many imperfect human tongues. His theory of language also ties in with other theories of his day when many believed in a perfect universal language where the signifier was effaced, or transparent. Human language was seen to be irreparably flawed, because of its arbitrary forms of communication, a permanent reminder of the presence of the signifier.[10] Attempts to supersede this problem of the fallibility of human language were common and, as with theories of pantomime, conceptions of a universal language which privileged bodily expression over speech were prevalent.[11]

Since it is a universal language, Lavater claims, physiognomy is open to all. Moreover, he implies that it is a person's Christian duty to learn this language in order to come closer to God. Yet human beings are, by nature, fallible, and therefore they have only an imperfect grasp of this language and of the workings of God. Lavater therefore admits that his physiognomical project is still in its infancy and he even doubts his own capacity as a

physiognomist, suggesting that, in the words of the Hunter translation: 'I am but a fragment of one'.[12]

In some respects this partial, fragmentary state of affairs is an advantage. Lavater's physiognomy is both pre-text and pretext: by studying man, by learning the language of one's immediate surroundings, one catches a glimpse of the vast spiritual realm which lies beyond. The importance of keen-sightedness in the physiognomist which is frequently stressed by Lavater is given an extra dimension: it is by using our physiognomical insights that we will catch sight of the next world and this will teach us to become better human beings and fill us with brotherly love. This idea of peeping through, of catching occasional glimpses, is reflected in the fragment form, later to be exploited by Romantic writers. The unevenness and incompleteness of the *Fragments* allows one literally to see through them and beyond them: one is not constrained by a cleanly cut formula or mould. Likewise, Lavater's exclamatory tone and frequent use of italics suggest how much he strives to express something beyond the bounds of human language. In the main German edition, this unevenness is reflected visually in the typography, for words to be emphasised are printed in bold, heightening the visual impact of Lavater's words and suggesting various 'layers' of comprehension.

However, Lavater is not content with these mere glimpses and feels that some form of completeness must be striven for. He predicts that physiognomy will one day become complete: '*Un système physiognomonique est une chose possible*' (I, 69). Herein lies the central paradox of the work: its overall aim is to finish the edifice, to fill in the gaps, to create a single uniform surface, despite an awareness that, in theological terms at least, such a project is not only impossible but presumptuous. Lavater's striving contains something of the Romantic idea of the artist as creator, usurping the place of God.

The physiognomist's task, therefore, is to reproduce the physiognomical *Ur-Sprache* as faithfully as possible. This is done by recreating, or indeed retracing the language. Knowledge, for Lavater, is inseparable from language, and the act of understanding, of interpretation, is synonymous with the act of making language, though humans can only stammer and fumble in their attempts to decipher. One method of coming closer to the divine language is by heightening ordinary language and this is done by increasing its volume, by 'filling the gaps' in existing language, literally by adding more words. Hence physiognomy consists in an endless search for new words:

> Que le Physionomiste multiplie les observations, qu'il saisisse des distinctions fines, qu'il fasse des expériences, qu'il indique des signes, qu'il invente de nouveaux mots pour de nouvelles observations & qu'il sache abstraire des propositions générales, en un mot, qu'il enrichisse, & perfectionne la Science, le langage, & le sens Physiognomoniques — & l'usage et l'utilité de la Science croîtront avec ses progrès (I, 76).

This search for new words is actualised in the gradual expansion of Lavater's work which started as a short lecture, passed through various intermediate stages and finally became a hefty four-volume work. In his prototype version, *Von der Physiognomik*, Lavater describes how he used to consult German dictionaries to expand his vocabulary. In fact, much of this early work consists of lists of adjectives without corresponding visual examples. The second French edition, the ten-volume *L'Art de connaître les hommes par la physionomie par Gaspard Lavater* (1805-9), edited by the physician Moreau de la Sarthe, is faithful to this idea of expansion, as is indicated by the subtitle of the work: *Nouvelle édition, corrigée et disposée dans un ordre plus méthodique, précédée d'une notice historique sur l'auteur; augmentée d'une exposition des recherches ou des opinions de La Chambre, de Porta, de Camper, de Gall, sur la physiognomonie; d'une Histoire anatomique et physiologique de la face avec des figures coloriées; et d'un très-grand nombre d'articles nouveaux sur les caractères des passions, des tempéramens et des maladies*. The work also includes complete transcripts of Le Brun's lectures on physiognomy and expression. Moreau states in his 'Discours Préliminaire': 'L'on trouve dans l'ouvrage de Lavater des lacunes à remplir' (I, 2). For practical and commercial reasons, several other early editions abridged Lavater's work. But Moreau's attempt to be both methodical and exhaustive is arguably more in the spirit of Lavater's physiognomical project.

Of course, the result of such an expansionist strategy is that it becomes extremely cumbersome. Lavater's schema seeks to multiply the physiognomic vocabulary *ad infinitum*, resulting in what seems to be an overload of information. Moreover, the diversity of material from Lavater and so many other 'authorities' precludes the idea of a system or a set of rules which can be abstracted from the data. But this maximising approach does reflect Lavater's view of the endless diversity of human forms. Hence his work is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Le Brun's minimalist physiognomics.

THE RECEPTION OF LAVATER IN FRANCE

The first French edition of Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomonie, destiné à faire connoître l'Homme & à le faire aimer* (1781-1803), was an expanded version of the *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-78), a lavishly illustrated, four-volume *in-folio* edition translated by La Fite, Caillard and Renfer. Though the first three volumes appeared fairly rapidly, publication of the final volume was delayed until 1803 due to the loss of subscriptions during and after the Revolution. The German and French editions were differently ordered, and the French engravings were more extensive and arguably of finer quality. Lavater had a large hand in the production of this French edition and as such it

represents his most accomplished contribution to the history of physiognomy. This French edition also formed the basis of the two early English editions by Thomas Holcroft and Henry Hunter.

Lavater's physiognomy initially had a low-key reception in France.[13] The 1782 *Correspondance littéraire* review is ironically critical, praising Lavater for doing away with many prejudices, but intimating that these prejudices 'tenaient moins sans doute à l'imperfection même de la science physiognomonique qu'à la sottise des docteurs qui s'étaient chargés jusqu'ici de l'enseigner'.[14] However, the reviewer finds the distinction between *physiognomy* and *pathognomy* an important one and keeps an open mind on the issue of measurement as a tool of character analysis. All in all he finds the subject 'trop contagieuse' and argues that in a country such as France where all mask their true self in order to resemble each other, physiognomy would never be a success. Nevertheless, by 1786 the response to Lavater was more favourable, as can be seen from Mallet's 'Fragment d'une lettre à M. Lavater' in *L'Année littéraire*. This review agrees with Lavater's position on the conjunction of physical and moral beauty, though it challenges Lavater to give more rules on physiognomy in forthcoming volumes.[15] The lack of physiognomical rules was a charge which was frequently levelled at Lavater by French commentators.

By the end of the century a veritable Lavater industry was under way. At least eight French editions of Lavater were produced during his lifetime and a host of physiognomical treatises inspired by Lavater appeared in the 1780s and '90s, a trend which continued well into the following century.[16] These works were extensively reviewed in the press and this brought even greater publicity. Initially Lavater's appeal was to a select audience: the lavish early volumes were clearly aimed at the purses of the rich. Beautifully illustrated, containing a host of works after famous artists, they themselves had the status of *objets d'art*. Lists of subscribers included in the first volume flattered readers that they were part of a select few. It also became fashionable for aristocratic travellers to visit the pastor at his Zurich home for a personal physiognomical consultation. After the Revolution, Lavater continued to entertain French aristocrats, now in exile.

In the early nineteenth century, however, Lavater's appeal became more popular, and cheaper, less elaborate editions became available. In his preface to the second French edition, Moreau criticises the early deluxe editions and states his aim to make his own edition more available to the general public. Various shortened versions of Lavater appeared, and a vogue began for pocket editions.[17] These were clearly designed not as unwieldy *objets d'art* but as guide books to be taken out onto the streets and carried around in the hand, encouraging the practice of empirical physiognomics.

The intellectual appeal of Lavater spread to both literature and science. Louis-Sébastien Mercier visited Lavater in Zurich in 1784 during a period of enforced exile, and was 'converted', composing a hymn-like ode to physiognomy in *Mon Bonnet de nuit* (1785). In his *Tableaux de Paris* (1783-88), he laments that Lavater cannot visit the Palais Royal to read the closed up faces of those who congregate there.[18] Mercier suggests, as does the *Correspondance littéraire* reviewer mentioned above, that French — and especially Parisian — faces are particularly resistant to physiognomical analysis so that even 'ce grand docteur' would have trouble deciphering them. Chateaubriand firmly defends Lavater's principles in his *Essai sur les révolutions* (1797), claiming that Lavater has perfected a science which was once revered by antiquity. Mme de Staël is more impressed by Lavater's personality than by his popular work on physiognomy. She writes warmly of Lavater's charisma and sincerity, of his 'mélange de pénétration et d'enthousiasme' and his complete confidence in 'des idées qu'on pourrait nommer superstitieuses', though she observes that his *amour-propre* may be 'la cause de ses idées bizarres sur lui-même et sur sa vocation miraculeuse'.[19] Lavaterian physiognomy also had considerable influence on the post-revolutionary novel, either from fervent admirers of Lavater or from anti-Lavaterian satirists.[20]

The scientific community also embraced Lavater's physiognomy. The doctor and anatomist J-J Süe produced an *Essai sur la physionomie des corps vivans considérée depuis l'Homme jusqu'à la plante* (Paris, 1797); Moreau de la Sarthe was himself a doctor which again testifies to the perennial link between medicine and physiognomy. Moreover, Gall and Spurzheim who worked together at the Paris Ecole de Médecine in the early 1800s, established their science of phrenology out of Lavaterian principles. Phrenology, drawing from Lavater's preoccupation with the permanent features, claimed to be able to deduce character from bumps on the skull.[21] In addition to science, some attempts were made to use physiognomy for social improvement though, from a modern perspective, these look like crude if not pernicious attempts at social engineering. Louis-Josephe-Marie Robert's *Essai sur la mégalanthropogénésie, ou l'Art de faire des Enfans d'esprit, qui deviennent de grands-hommes; suivi des traits physiognomoniques propres à les faire reconnaître, décrits par Lavater, et du meilleur mode de génération* (1801) incorporates Lavater's physiognomy with a programme for selective breeding to produce a superior grade of citizens.

Lavater's personal contacts with France were established in Alsace, and a military academy in Colmar was the meeting point for Lavater, Grimm, Mercier and others.[22] A tenuous connection also existed between Diderot and Lavater, according to Roland Mortier.[23] Though the two never met, Mortier

claims that Diderot could well have overseen the French translation of the *Fragments*, but for the delay of the editor, Leuchsenring. In a letter to Lavater of 1775, Leuchsenring says that he has been ill and that he has asked Diderot to assist him by looking over the translation. However, Lavater, annoyed by Leuchsenring's subsequent procrastinations, decided to engage someone else as editor. Diderot's portrait, a profile engraving after the work by Greuze, is discussed in the *Fragments*. The 'expertise' of Lavater's physiognomical appraisal is clearly grounded in his acquired knowledge of Diderot's sober public persona as editor of the *Encyclopédie*, and he fails to perceive the passionate and eclectic writer who is well known to modern readers. 'Je ne le crois pas d'une grande sensibilité', Lavater professes, and he suggests that the *philosophe* has a somewhat plodding brain: 'J'apperçois [...] dans cette tête une force productrice qui n'agit point par élans, mais qui a besoin de travailler son sujet, d'y réfléchir, & de le traiter par ordre' (II, 243). More significant than Lavater's physiognomical reading, however, is the promotion of the *philosophe* in Moreau de la Sarthe's edition. This work reproduces Diderot's chapter on expression from the *Essais sur la peinture* and, in the introduction, Diderot's portrait is placed alongside Lavater's and their physiognomies are contrasted. Though Diderot may not have been directly associated with the *Fragments*, the strategic placing of his portrait at the front of the work testifies to Diderot's status as a physiognomical figurehead in France on a par with Lavater.

It is appropriate to look at Lavater's work in a foreign language, because translation is a metaphor for his whole physiognomical project. Lavater talks of the need to '*Déchiffrer* l'immense Alphabet de la Nature' (italics mine), the emphasis being on decoding and interpreting another language. In other words, it is necessary to provide an equivalent in another language, to transfer from the divine language of nature to the mortal language of man. Just as the Biblical translator is charged with reproducing the scriptures, so the physiognomist seeks to recreate this divine language. And yet, bound up in Lavater's thinking is the idea of translation loss, for it is suggested that human language can never perfectly render the language of physiognomy.[24]

The pattern of original and replica is woven into the *Fragments* through their translation into other languages, especially French. Lavater's German edition serves as a kind of *Ur*-text which can never be matched in another language. Just as French renders imperfectly Lavater's impassioned German tones, so the language of physiognomy, however inventive, will never achieve a perfect copy. The translator's preface to the first French edition comments that the two languages are fundamentally different:

Un des privilèges de la langue Allemande est de pouvoir créer au besoin de nouveaux mots, de les composer de manière qu'un seul mot réveille à la fois plusieurs idées, et c'est surtout

ce qui le rend si énergique et si belle [...] Personne n'a usé avec plus de hardiesse que notre Auteur de la liberté de composer des mots, et il est impossible d'imiter ses créations, lorsqu'on écrit dans une langue bien moins féconde et bien plus sévère (I, ix).

It is suggested that German has a capacity for constant self-invention which French lacks, but also that Lavater himself is extremely inventive with the language he uses, thus rendering the task of translation doubly difficult. As if in confirmation of the translator's fears, the *Correspondance littéraire* review finds the French translation 'insipide'.

ENLIGHTENED PHYSIOGNOMICS?

In terms of their content and methodology, the *Fragments* exhibit several of the characteristics of 'Enlightened Physiognomics' which were identified in Chapter 1. In other words, Lavater works largely within the same epistemological framework as Bougeant and Buffon had done forty years earlier. Like so many of his eighteenth-century predecessors, he rejects metoposcopy and chiromancy, for in his view they 'disfigure' the beautiful science of physiognomy: 'On a défiguré cette belle Science, on l'a transformée en une charlatanerie déraisonnable et bizarre, on l'a confondue avec la Chiromancie & l'art prétendue divinatoire de lire la destinée sur le front' (I, 40). He emphasises the face, for it is here that man's moral nature is most clearly visible, although he does not discount gesture, gait and even handwriting as giving clues to personality, and includes sections on all these in his work.

The anthropocentrism which was revealed in Chapter 1 as fundamental to eighteenth-century physiognomy is also found in Lavater. Only one fragment (II, 9) is devoted to animal physiognomies: Della Porta and Aristotle's views on comparative physiognomy are referred to, as well as Camper's theories of the facial angle. Though Lavater's comments on animal physiognomy triggered a revival of interest in the subject in other writers, it would be wrong to see comparative physiognomy as central to Lavater's work.[25] For it is man, according to Lavater, who is the most perfect of God's creations and this is so because he is the meeting point of animal, spiritual and moral life. Lavater applies the Ovidian topos of the dignity of man which Buffon had also used, describing man as upright, alert, confident: 'D'un pas ferme & léger, il touche la surface de la Terre, tandis que sa tête s'élève vers le Ciel; sa portée s'étend au loin, il agit par le contact le plus immédiat, le plus varié, & avec une promptitude, avec une facilité inconcevables' (I, 17). As with Buffon, man is in the dual position of observer and observed: he is 'l'objet le plus digne d'être observé, comme il est en même temps le plus digne observateur' (I, 16). Like his predecessors, Lavater is aware of the possibility for mutual physiognomising. He also draws attention to man's swiftness, flexibility and

suppleness, suggesting that he has 'la plus étonnante mobilité' (I, 18). Whereas elsewhere he dismisses Buffon as an 'adversaire peu redoutable' (III, 16), at this point Lavater comes closer to Buffon's *pathognomics* than to his own *physiognomics*.

Though Lavater's anthropocentrism is fundamental to the *Fragments*, as with Buffon, it is predicated on a racial hierarchy which to us today seems both dubious and pernicious. For Lavater, as for many of his contemporaries, moral and intellectual supremacy is seen as inseparable from a certain kind of physical beauty, namely the white European with aquiline features. Members of other cultures with their seemingly flattened noses and protruding jaws are thought to be irredeemably low, stupid and base. Lavater goes so far as to suggest that, such is the harmony between cause and effect in nature, Leibniz's *Théodicée* could not have been conceived in the brain of a Laplander, an argument which is deftly countered by Lichtenberg: 'Und warum nicht?'[26]

Aside from these questionable assumptions about race, Lavater's physiognomy is based on an optimistic view of man. As the edition's subtitle suggests, it is: 'destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer'. To know man is therefore to love him, and physiognomy may actively contribute to human happiness. He maintains that by looking for the good in one's fellow men, one will find it, and one will also pardon the bad. Bougeant had criticised the *moraliste* tradition for its harsh judgements on human beings and encouraged amateur physiognomists to seek the good in man, and Lavater seems here to be arguing a similar point. Yet Lavater's argument, unlike that of Bougeant, is underpinned by his evangelical impulses, even though these are often difficult to square with the harshness of certain of his individual physiognomical pronouncements. The playful tone of Bougeant's *Lettres* is replaced in the *Fragments* by a deep seriousness. Physiognomy for Lavater is much more than a parlour game or even a means to stay afloat in society: it is a method of improving social relations and individual moral behaviour.

The empirical basis to physiognomical analysis is also evident in Lavater's work. At the beginning of the *Fragments*, Lavater describes his own initiation to physiognomy. He notices that he has a gift for observing faces and deducing moral qualities. This he develops both by sketching and by making comparisons with as many subjects as possible. Though he turns to books for information, he rejects these in favour of 'l'étude de la nature elle-même & les images qui la représentent' (I, 13). He also emphasises the empirical advantage he has had of coming into contact with many people through travel and in his function as a clergyman. To an extent, therefore, Lavater's method is a process of experimentation, comparison and deduction from largely visual evidence. Often the *Fragments* adopt a tentative and provisional tone, which underlines the conjectural approach to physiognomy at this time. This tentative approach

is not just the caution of an observational scientific method akin to that of Bougeant, for it also points to the religious dimension in Lavater's thinking. As physiognomists, he suggests, we wrestle with two contradictory urges: we strive to reach godliness, but each encounter reminds us of our own frailty and presumptuousness.[27] Unfortunately, this form of reasoning is frequently contradicted by the dogmatic tone of his individual analyses, such as that of Diderot, where the reader is expected meekly to accept the truth of his pronouncements. In his analysis of the portraits of great men (for it is chiefly men who are discussed), Lavater frequently resorts to the reverse form of reasoning: starting with some knowledge of the famous person's character and achievements, he then seeks in the portrait the facial features which correspond to his talents and bear out the label 'genius'.

Like Bougeant, Lavater suggests that physiognomical judgement is an instinctive and intensely human activity. In the Fragment 'De la facilité de l'étude physiognomonique' he argues that no-one who lives in society can fail to make physiognomical judgements just through the ordinary business of daily interaction. With some false modesty, he admits that he is little suited to this form of study, being short-sighted, busy, impatient, a bad draughtsman and lacking knowledge of anatomy and a good vocabulary. The suggestion is that anyone may try their hand. Lavater sometimes adopts a tone and even a position of intimacy with the reader: 'Placez-vous en idée auprès de moi [...] Lisez & jugez-moi comme vous le feriez si nous lisions cet Ouvrage à côté l'un de l'autre' (I, vi). The suggestion is that the reader's physiognomical gaze will be aligned with Lavater's, hardly a position from which to criticise him. The theme of physiognomy in the private sphere recalls Bougeant's own tone of intimacy in the *Lettres* and seems far removed from the traditional notion of physiognomist as 'expert', as a superior or marginal figure in the community.

But there is a double-edged quality to Lavater's thought in this area. He argues that physiognomy is open to all, but at the same time he suggests that only a minority of people are uniquely gifted. He uses the example of drawing to demonstrate this point, arguing that, whilst it is easy to draw, not everyone can become a great artist (I, 116). It was seen in Bougeant's work how physiognomy came close to contemporary theories of connoisseurship. This parallel is fully borne out in the *Fragments* where physiognomical judgement is defined as a kind of heightened seeing: 'Où l'oeil foible & novice du spectateur inattentif ne soupçonne rien, l'oeil exercé du connoisseur trouve une source inépuisable de plaisirs intellectuels & moraux' (I, 77). Just as theories of connoisseurship hovered between two conceptions of the connoisseur, either a person possessing inborn talent or someone who has acquired skills through learning and experience, so too Lavater's physiognomy hovers between conflicting conceptions of the physiognomist.

In fact, despite his apparent egalitarianism, Lavater does much to promote the idea of the physiognomist as expert. His physiognomical analyses, instead of teaching the reader how to look, actually read as sweeping moral pronouncements. Commenting on a particular face, profile or facial part, he declares that it reveals intelligence or stupidity, cunning or weakness, with little or no explanation as to why this is so. The fact that there are so many illustrations in the work gives the impression that the reader can learn from these visual examples. But in fact the sheer number of examples works against this. Lavater appears to provide a plethora of information for the reader, but in reality he fails to lay down scientific method, a set of general principles which can be applied to individual examples, and this is something for which he was repeatedly criticised both during his lifetime and afterwards. At one level, therefore, Lavater is being unscientific; at another level, he seems almost deliberately to distance himself from his readership by withholding information and by mystifying the subject. This strategy signals a return to the traditional role of the physiognomist who, like the physician or soothsayer, was something of an outsider within the community by virtue of his ability to impart unfathomable wisdom. This aspect of the *Fragments* is enhanced by historical fact: Lavater enjoyed a cult status in his lifetime and was able to draw visitors from all over Europe to Zurich to hear his physiognomical readings. The subject is further mystified by Lavater's religious leanings, for he tends to play the role of priest, and thus place himself in a position closer to the mind of God than that of ordinary people.

In reality, Lavater's empiricism gives way to an altogether less rational agenda. This is in contrast to thinkers such as Bougeant and Buffon who had tried to ally physiognomy with rational and secular thought processes. This aspect of his work is often labelled pre-Romantic, but its roots are somewhat older than this. The concept of genius which is crucial to Lavater's physiognomy is in many ways a modern manifestation of the traditional physiognomist who possesses a vision beyond that of ordinary people and whose methods are impenetrable.[28] Lavater distinguishes between wisdom and genius using the example of Dürer and Raphael:

> Le Physionomiste purement *savant*, mesure comme *Durer*: le *Génie Physiognomonique* mesure & sent comme *Raphaël*. Du reste plus l'esprit observateur acquerra de finesse & la langue s'enrichira, & on fera de progrès dans l'Art du dessin, & l'Homme étudiera l'Homme, l'Etre le plus excellent & le plus intéressant de la Terre, — plus aussi la Physiognomonie deviendra scientifique, c'est à dire, plus elle sera déterminée, plus elle sera facile à étudier & à enseigner. Elle deviendra la Science des Sciences, & alors proprement elle ne sera plus Science — mais sensation, sentiment vif & prompt de la Nature Humaine. — Alors il y auroit de la folie à la réduire en Science; bientôt on verroit de toute part disputer, écrire, ouvrir des coeurs sur la Physiognomonie, & dès lors elle ne seroit plus ce qu'elle doit être, — la première Science de l'humanité (I, 67).

The distinction between art and science is extremely slim here, something which would not seem incongruous to the eighteenth-century mind, but which clarifies Lavater's assertion that physiognomy will one day become a science. Clearly science for Lavater lies not in precision and rigorous rule-making which are mere earthly preoccupations, but like great art it transcends the rules, to achieve a form of mystical communion with God.[29]

Lavater's view of nature also appears to stem from an earlier conception of physiognomy than the eighteenth-century version. On one level, Lavater's argument that God's perfection is visible in nature has much in common with the creationist arguments of eighteenth-century deists and Christians alike. But beyond this, he seems to suggest a return to the Renaissance theory of correspondences:

> Je ne promets point [...] de donner en entier l'immense Alphabet qui serviroit à déchiffrer le langage original de la Nature, écrite sur le visage de l'Homme & dans tout son extérieur; mais je me flatte d'avoir au moins tracé *quelques-uns des caractères* de cet Alphabet divin, & ils seront assez lisibles pour qu'un oeil sain puisse les reconnoître partout où il les retrouvera (I, vii).

Here he sees nature as full of secrets waiting to be uncovered. The idea of decoding or deciphering is central here, and Lavater suggests that these physiognomical signs are not self-evident but can only be detected by those with 'un oeil sain'.

Lavater's work also marks a return to traditional physiognomy in its emphasis on the fixed facial parts over the moving ones. (Pseudo-)Aristotle had warned of the difficulties of judging people by their facial expression because it could be so easily feigned by the wicked, and many treatises over the ages had reinforced this view. Yet, as this book has amply demonstrated, *pathognomy* in many different forms had become prevalent during the eighteenth century. Indeed, Lavater claims that *physiognomy* is 'beaucoup moins connue' (I, 26) than its counterpart, which is further evidence of the pervasiveness of the *pathognomical* in eighteenth-century thought. Lavater's reinstatement of *physiognomy* must therefore be seen as a regressive step, one which was heavily criticised by Lichtenberg who deliberately took the opposing side to Lavater by privileging *pathognomy* or what he termed the 'Semiotik der Affekten'.[30] Moreover, it leads Lavater to take a more deterministic view of character than many *pathognomical* theories of character which have already been examined, as I shall argue in the final section of this chapter. It therefore appears that several aspects of Lavater's work undermine the enlightened tendencies of his predecessors.

PHYSIOGNOMY AND ART

According to Lavater, art is: 'mère & fille de la Physiognomonie' (I, 65) and thus he reaffirms the long association between physiognomy and the visual arts which was exploited, amongst others, by Leonardo da Vinci and Charles Le Brun. The *Fragments* are connected with art at many levels: their visual content and appeal; their use of various art forms as metaphors; their pronouncements on aesthetics, and their epistemological parallels between physiognomy and the creative process.[31] In this short section I will outline the links between physiognomy and art, pointing out Lavater's place within various traditions, and I will also examine Lavater's preference for *physiognomy* over *pathognomy* in terms of an aesthetics of stillness which contrasts so markedly with the aesthetics of movement which predominated in mid-eighteenth century France.

The statement that art is both mother and daughter of physiognomy suggests a perpetually cyclical and mutually dependent relationship: each one 'gives birth' to the other. The same creative urge is felt by artist and physiognomist: sketching the people around them, Lavater reveals in his account of how he became a physiognomist, is a first impulse for artists and physiognomists alike. The sketch gives a glimpse of individual brilliance, of the divine qualities inherent in man which are not visible from his polished exterior. Incomplete, yet vital, brilliant and expressive, it is the visual equivalent of the fragment, and is a metaphor for the whole work: in the preface to the *Fragments*, Lavater suggests that his project is a mere 'sketch' of a total physiognomical project. It is interesting that the sketch for Lavater has different symbolic value to that of French theorists of the mid-eighteenth century who were fascinated by the sketch's ability to capture a perpetually moving subject. For Lavater, the sketch's rapidity is of little concern: it is its partial quality which matters.

The frontispiece to the *Fragments* contains the Biblical declaration: 'Dieu créa l'homme à sa propre image'. Lavater interprets this in a novel fashion to mean that the act of creation is physiognomical one, a case of 'In the beginning was the Face'. Christ is the most perfect physical manifestation of the divine Logos, the visible form of an invisible God, and Lavater's anxiety over the appearance of Christ runs like a leitmotif through the *Fragments*. He longs to know how Jesus looked, certain that if he could only look upon His face he would have true physiognomical, hence divine revelation. The face of Christ is also a model to be imitated: becoming Christ-like means not just behaving like Jesus but also growing to look like Him. He suggests that, just as with Christ, one should be able to see God through the traits of man. For artists too, He is a model, being the embodiment of physical perfection, and at one point, Lavater

peruses a series of old master depictions of Christ and finds them all in some measure unsatisfactory.

Both physiognomy and art are concerned with the interpretation of forms in nature. In this sense Lavater equates the science of physiognomy with a Neo-Platonic theory of artistic production where representation is itself an act of interpretation. By reproducing the features of an object one creates a new language. Yet, just as with translation, there is always a sense of loss involved, for God is the only true artist or maker of forms in nature, and human beings can only copy such forms. Artists are ennobled by their desire to imitate the great work of God which is manifest in nature, and yet they are ultimately no more than mere copyists. Lavater's practice of making physiognomical judgements from engravings of portraits, in other words at two or even three removes from the original, seems excessively derivative, and yet it fits with his scheme of things, for one is perpetually dealing with copies, searching for the most perfect one which is nearest to the original. Yet Lavater suggests that artistic activity is worthwhile: because it captures a visual resemblance, art is closer to the language of physiognomy than verbal language. He states: 'Le dessin est la langue naturelle de la Physiognomonie' (I, 122). In fact, one of the functions of images in the *Fragments* is to compensate for verbal language, to provide visual evidence when words are inadequate.

The mutuality of physiognomy and art can be seen literally in the *Fragments* which are works of art in themselves, especially the early deluxe editions, compiled with the help of esteemed artists and engravers. They are portrait galleries containing countless engravings of old master paintings and they also contain much practical advice to the artist. Lavater claims that artists and physiognomists have encountered similar problems, such as bad light or an unfavourable moment, and he insists that each can learn from the other. In fact, Fuseli's preface to the first English edition explicitly states that the work is for the benefit of young artists. Thus trainee artists and aspiring physiognomists are given the same programme.

There are several echoes of artists' pattern books in the *Fragments*, such as those of Le Brun and Jombert's *Méthode pour apprendre le dessin* (Plate 14b). Fragment 5 in volume III of the *Fragments* is devoted to separate facial and bodily parts. Here the body is seen as a collection of fragments, or tiny pieces. The idea that one can start with an individual detail and build up to a total unified picture is mirrored in Lavater's physiognomical method. Pages of text are faced by plates showing rows of eyes, ears, noses and mouths (Plate 15a). As in Jombert's work, three different types of illustration are included: simple line profiles, lightly shaded features and full engravings, which provide differing degrees of complexity for the trainee artist. Moreover, Lavater's emphasis on measurement and proportion as well as on the study of anatomy

and osteology are deeply traditional, a constituent part of contemporary drawing methods. Observation of nature is paramount for Lavater but he also considers that learning from 'models' is important. Lavater also advocates the keeping of a further collection of portraits and drawings as a means of comparison. In this he speaks from experience, for during his life he amassed a vast collection of engravings and silhouettes of famous people and acquaintances.[32] This echoes Leonardo's advice to the artist to keep a set of drawings in his studio for reference.

* * *

In the *Fragments*, Lavater develops an aesthetics of stillness. This can be seen in his approach to portraiture, which is discussed at length. Of exceptional interest to the physiognomist, portraiture attempts to reproduce a unique individual through the emphasis of characteristic traits and to align the spiritual qualities with physical ones. Portraits can be analysed in the absence of the individual, and Lavater goes so far as to suggest that they are even more useful than observation from life. Sometimes physiognomy is out of step with connoisseurship, for Lavater shows that a bad piece of art may lend itself regardless to physiognomical analysis. For example, he finds that the engraving of a mediocre bust of Locke nevertheless reveals the characteristics of the philosopher.

Above all it is the fixity of the portrait which fascinates Lavater: more reliable than his everyday physiognomical encounters, a crucial detail which may escape during a fleeting incident is captured for ever on canvas to be contemplated at leisure. The idea that a frozen reproduction may give more insight into a person's character than a live incident is taken to a morbid extreme in Lavater's fascination with death masks. For him, the moment of death is deeply expressive and absorbing because it is the moment of departure of the soul from the body. This is one of several moments in the *Fragments* when Lavater suggests that the afterlife is more important than the here and now, and this is a curious reformulation of the divinatory aspect of traditional physiognomy. Thus for Lavater, stillness is more eloquent than movement, death more eloquent than life. This theory could not be further from that of La Tour, who lamented the difficulty of capturing his sitters' moving expressions, but who developed a strategy of 'chasing after' them by incorporating movement into his pictures: he emphasised the moving fleshy parts and lively eyes, and the pastel he used was evocative of perpetual movement and the present tense. His Abbé Pommyer embodied this world rather than the next, stressing the secular nature of his physiognomy.

Of all portrait types, Lavater's preference is for silhouettes, of which the *Fragments* contain many examples (Plate 15b). This technique draws attention

to the permanent facial features, the skull and jawline, the profile and nose, which Lavater saw as far more telling than the mobile features. Like the sketch, the silhouette is a partial representation, yet paradoxically, it is more revealing than a fuller one. The object of observation is pared down, purged of extraneous detail, which leads to a concentration on just a few heightened traits, hence Lavater's remark that silhouettes are 'de tous les portraits le plus foible & le plus achevé' (II, 157). The silhouette also recalls the legend of the origins of painting when Dibutade, a young peasant girl, drew the silhouette of her lover on the wall as he was sleeping on the night before his departure for battle. Thus, as well as exploiting the contemporary vogue for silhouettes, Lavater evokes something primal, possessing an almost mystic purity. But above all, for Lavater the silhouette is an ideal form for it leaves no painterly traces. It is the true imprint of nature:

> Une telle copie est *foible* car elle n'offre rien de positif, & ne rend que le contour extérieur de la moitié du visage; elle est fidelle, car elle est l'empreinte immédiate de la Nature, & porte un caractère d'originalité que l'Artiste le plus habile ne sauroit saisir au même degré de perfection dans un dessin fait à la main (I, 157).

The degree of human intercession in the artistic process is equated with fallibility, with obfuscation of the true godly message. Only by removing the human signifier will the divine signified stand clear.

Lavater's enthusiasm for the expressive power of silhouette outlines is cruelly parodied by Lichtenberg in his *Fragment von Schwänzen*. Lichtenberg conducts a pseudo-Lavaterian analysis of the tails of a pig, a dog, the devil and various human pigtails, even down to the annotated illustrations, and the bawdy undercurrent is rendered more ridiculous by being clothed in a quasi-religious, enthused prose style. What Lichtenberg exposes is the human propensity to read into any shape certain expressive qualities, and the danger of forming a set of precepts from such a subjective enterprise.

The silhouette also enables the physiognomist to geometrise the face, to see it in terms of straight lines, curves and angles. Some of the profiles are annotated by Lavater, 'interpreted' by means of a series of lines and angle measurements. In these thin, non-corporeal outlines, one can see a strong parallel with Le Brun's minimalist physiognomics. Le Brun's drawings upheld line as intellectually superior to colour, and his theories were based on geometrical principles, such as the angle of an eye (upwards at the edges suggesting spirituality, downwards suggesting bestiality). In both Le Brun and Lavater, the human face is reduced to a series of lines, symbolising the cerebral and tending towards abstraction. In Lavater's case, this represents a search for the ideal, a striving towards godliness, hence the strong measure of Christian asceticism, the denial of worldliness. Gone are the flesh and colour which were emphasised in mid-eighteenth century French aesthetic theory. The stillness of

the Le Brunian aesthetic with its petrified passions is caused by a draining of life from his human subjects and the same is true of Lavater. Lavater's physiognomy therefore upholds contour and line as artistic paradigms. But much closer to his work than Le Brun's theories are those of his contemporary Winckelmann. The German theorist championed the plastic qualities of Greek sculpture: stillness, firmness of contour, noble outline, and the stoic restraint of the passions. For Lavater, the Greek ideal becomes yet another means of apprehending the nature of God, for Christian and pagan imagery are conflated and physical beauty is epitomised in the head of Antinous: 'Un homme sans pareil, l'habitant d'un monde meilleur, un Demi Dieu' (I, 264). Antinous, like Christ, unites the qualities of the human and the divine, and indeed elsewhere Lavater laments that antiquity cannot provide a profile of Christ, for this truly would be a most perfect image. Greek civilisation is viewed as a kind of Paradise and the Greeks really are a more beautiful race: the greatness of their works is the product of their faithful copying of this perfect nature. In contrast, modern man is irreparably fallen, damaged by *climat*, forms of government and 'moeurs si polies et si efféminées!'

But as Régis Michel has argued, Winckelmann's pursuit of the ideal brings with it a great danger, namely the silent annihilation of art itself.[33] The purging of corporeality, of material substance, of expression from the work of art leads to 'la pureté mortelle de la page blanche'. The end point of this extreme intellectualisation of art is linear hieroglyphs which are writing and not drawing. This tendency is also evident in Lavater's work, where facial features often become reduced to single lines, for example the slope of a forehead (Plate 16a). Lips, instead of being considered in their shape and fullness, are interesting to Lavater only in terms of the horizontal lines which form between them when they are closed. The aesthetic of mid-eighteenth century, exemplified by Caylus's unveiling of the face of Agamemnon, ran the risk of saying too much, for in its search for maximum expression, it did not leave enough to the imagination. In Lavater, by contrast, the aesthetic has reached a point of extreme minimalism which runs the risk of saying too little.

THE CIRCLE OF CHARACTER

Lavater sees *physiognomy*, the study of the fixed features, as the true science of nature whereas *pathognomy*, that of the moving ones, is corrupt and worldly: 'La Physiognomonie est le miroir du Naturaliste et du Sage. La Pathognomonique est le miroir des Courtisans et des Gens du Monde' (I, 26). The aesthetic dimension of Lavater's preference for *physiognomy* over *pathognomy* has been explored above. But in addition to this, his view on *physiognomy* is underpinned by a particular conception of character. His definition of both is revealing: 'La première [*physiognomy*] considère l'homme

tel qu'il est en général; celle-ci [*pathognomy*], tel qu'il est dans le moment présent. L'une calcule ce qu'il peut ou ne peut pas devenir, ce qu'il peut être ou ne pas être; l'autre ce qu'il veut ou ne veut pas être' (I, 25). This crucial distinction between 'pouvoir' and 'vouloir' marks the difference underlying *physiognomical* and *pathognomical* conceptions of character. The former stresses human potential but also the boundaries of individual capability; the latter emphasises being as an active process involving the will, but also the limitations of that will.

In order to understand Lavater's conception of character, it is helpful to go back to the debates of his contemporaries, Pernety, de Catt and Formey, at the Berlin Academy in the late 1760s and early 1770s.[34] According to Thiébault, a somewhat unreliable eyewitness, de Catt, who was Frederick's private secretary and *lecteur*, harangued Pernety about physiognomy from the time of the latter's arrival in Potsdam and eventually proposed a debate in which Pernety would lay out the benefits of physiognomy which de Catt would oppose with a sceptical view.[35] Thiébault is disparaging of their results and relates that court gossip revolved around whether the two men's respective positions were not in fact decided by Pernety's good looks and de Catt's ugliness. Despite these petty squabbles, the debates are interesting because they formulate two very different theories of character which may be conveniently labelled *physiognomical* and *pathognomical*, even though the protagonists do not themselves use these labels.

Pernety, like Lavater, has a fixed notion of character: 'Il n'est pas exactement vrai que l'on agisse, ou même que l'on puisse agir constamment contre son caractere. On change quelquefois de route, on prend des moyens différens pour parvenir au même but; mais on ne perd pas de vûe son objet, on ne change pas d'intention, on est toujours conforme à soi-même'.[36] He argues that the passions are separate from character and are merely an incidental part of the self: 'Les passions [...] peuvent être passagers [...] le caractere reste toujours le même'.[37] Pernety's physiognomy is grounded in a conception of an authentic self which is compromised in cultivated society, for social life encourages self-fashioning and consequently self-concealment. Hence, for Pernety, the terms 'acting' and 'deception' collapse into one another.[38]

Physiognomy, in claiming to reveal fundamental character traits through the permanent features, rests on a belief in a pure, untainted self which is unaffected by surroundings. Character is seen as closed and atemporal, deriving its strength from this intrinsic self-containedness. The emphasis is not so much on what one does but on what one is, and changes through self-improvement or education do not have a place in this rationale. And yet the negative essentialist and determinist assumptions behind it are counterbalanced by idealism, by a vision of character as possessing an innate purity. One finds

echoes of Rousseau in this yearning to reconstruct a pure, 'natural' self, though Rousseau's view is counterbalanced by his awareness of man's role in civil life. Rousseau also stresses man's desire to move outside himself in *Emile*, and not to remain within a closed character. Because *physiognomy* rests on the notion of fixed character, and because it excludes any incidental or accidental force which may come from the outside world, it presents itself as an infallible index. Its chief claim is that it operates outside society, and its uncompromising viewpoint allows one to see beyond the fickle and fleeting social world.

Pernety's vision of *physiognomy* is carried to an extreme by Jean-Henri-Samuel Formey, Secrétaire Perpétuel of the Berlin Academy. In his coda to the debates of Pernety and de Catt, 'Les Physionomies appréciées' (1775), Formey distinguishes between a 'physionomie naturelle' and a 'physionomie acquise'.[39] The former is the pure self, untainted by commerce with the world. A healthy, well-nourished child will at fifteen years have the face of the day he was born. He will have acquired an intelligent air through his education and his features will have grown in proportion to his body, but otherwise he will be unchanged. On second thoughts, however, Formey suggests that a true physiognomy never existed: no face is entirely pure and unadulterated, unless it is the face of a savage. The savage's face, unlike that of civilised man, reveals 'les vraies empreintes de la nature'.

In contrast to the 'physionomie naturelle,' the 'physionomie acquise' is presented in very negative terms. Formey sees the human psyche and hence the physiognomy as highly frail, able to be damaged by a multitude of negative external influences. The terms prefigure Freud, except that it is not the psyche which is damaged by painful encounters with the world but rather the child's face. Clearly for Formey mind and body are one: the face bears the physical marks of an inner state. The child's experience of the world is presented as a series of disfiguring accidents, beginning with the mother's harmful influence whilst it is still in the womb: 'L'enfant défiguré qui arrive au monde, n'a plus sa physionomie réelle et originaire que celui à qui un éclat de bombe a bouleversé toute l'économie du visage' (p. 391). Formey's argument is far from eccentric or reactionary, for the belief that the mother's actions or mental state can have a strikingly literal somatic effect on the unborn child is surprisingly common in medical writing of the time, where eating strawberries or seeing rabbits while pregnant can mean giving birth to a child with a strawberry birth-mark or a hare lip. Lavater, too, devotes a section of his *Fragments* to the effects of the mother's imagination on the unborn child. Formey suggests that the midwife's incompetence at birth can also harm the child if she roughly pushes its head into odd 'unnatural' shapes. The child is seen as 'cire molle' to be shaped or indeed misshaped by its encounters with

the world. Indeed, childhood trauma can mark the face for ever: Formey tells of a child who is taken to a puppet show and frightened by the spectacle, an 'accident' which gives him for ever 'une physionomie fort niaise'.

Formey's conception of the true self is therefore that which is located furthest away from society. The nearer one comes to integrating with the world, the more one is damaged by it. The image of the unborn child as possessing the perfect physiognomy stresses the fundamentally abstract quality of the self, so that it is as intangible as the soul. It is an ideal construction but is essentially passive and unable to respond positively to outside influences.

In contrast to the other thinkers, de Catt argues for a *pathognomical* notion of character. He claims that 'puisque les hommes peuvent agir d'une manière opposée à celle que promettent leur caractere, et même les passions qu'ils ressentent actuellement, les connoissances physionomiques nous montrent tout au plus ce qu'un homme feroit s'il suivoit son caractere ou sa passion: il faut avoir recours à d'autres moyens pour savoir ce qu'il fera'.[40] De Catt suggests that men are not slaves to their characters, and that behaviour and actions can be quite separate.[41] It seems as if character were incidental, having a subordinate role in man's make-up, and being effaced by the passions and by external circumstances. Using a well-worn eighteenth-century topos, he goes on to suggest that permanent character is built up from passion, from the repetition of fugitive states.

Pathognomy, therefore, integrates the individual into society. It holds that experience of the world shapes the individual and that people have autonomy and a degree of complicity in their own self-image. This fabrication might come about through worldly events or through deliberate self-cultivation. The build-up of character is seen as a temporal, cumulative process and hence there is a greater emphasis on acting rather than being. Bougeant's parallel with connoisseurship is appropriate here: not only is contemplating people's faces a skill of civilised society; it is the crafted nature of the art object, its man-made qualities, which are to be appreciated. It appears that *pathognomy* is also a secular vision, less preoccupied with man as he might be and more with what he is from day to day. It is noticeable that the two major advocates of *physiognomy* in the eighteenth century, Pernety and Lavater, bring in the religious dimension to their arguments, whereas the advocates of *pathognomy* tend not to.

However, *pathognomy* has a curious double status for, as well as being social, it is 'natural'. As the study of the passions, it is also linked with the spontaneous outpourings of the self. *Pathognomy*, therefore, encompasses both natural and instituted signs, the former being the spontaneous cries of nature such as joy or pain, and the latter being the signs of social interaction which are fixed on by consensus. Social life hovers between natural and instituted

signs: the moment the production of a natural sign involves choice on the part of the signer, it slides into the domain of instituted signs. It is precisely the difficulty of distinguishing between natural and instituted signs, of spotting a fake from a genuine emotion, that leads to the strong criticism of *pathognomy* by the *physiognomists*, especially Lavater.

* * *

Lavater envisages human character as a whole, a perfect unit. But it is a unity which also implies constraint, suggested by the image of the circle or sphere: 'L'homme est libre comme l'oiseau l'est dans sa cage. Il a un cercle d'activité & de sensibilité, mais au delà duquel il ne peut s'élancer. De même que le corps humain a des contours qui le terminent, chaque esprit a sa sphère dans laquelle il se meut; mais cette sphère est invariablement déterminée' (II, 19). The view of character as a contained sphere reflects Lavater's adherence to *physiognomy* rather than *pathognomy*. Like Pernety, he sees character as essential and determined, rather than the more freely roving, self-developing *pathognomical* character. In this sense, Lavater brings back the traditional deterministic element to physiognomy which had disappeared from the more *pathognomical* theories of character which had predominated earlier in the eighteenth century.

In part Lavater's theory of character reflects Leibniz's monadology, the idea of perfectly self-contained units, each one unique and different. It suggests that God assigns to the individual certain gifts and liabilities which he or she is powerless to change. No-one is an angel, but one's duty is to make the most of the talents which have been bestowed on one: 'Chaque homme doit être mesuré d'après ses propres forces. La question n'est pas de savoir "ce que nous ferions à sa place", mais "de quoi il est capable en vertu des facultés dont il est doué, ce qu'on peut attendre de lui dans les circonstances où il se trouve"' (II, 19-20). This is also expressed in an agricultural metaphor: 'Chaque homme a un grand cercle d'activité, & se trouve maître d'un champ qu'il peut ensemencer selon la nature du terroir. Mais il ne peut y jetter d'autre semence que celle qui lui a été donnée, ni cultiver un autre terrain que celui où il se voit placé' (II, 21).

Unsurprisingly, Lavater is unable to relate to Helvétius's conception of the individual as fully formed by external worldly factors, claiming that the free-thinker has committed 'des péchés irrémissibles' (I, 19). His conception of character is reproduced literally and visually through a set of portraits set in circular frames, and he comments on the subject of each one: 'Elle [la personne] peut exercer une mesure de liberté & de force, & hors duquel elle ne peut exécuter rien d'important' (Plate 16b). Paradoxically, he seems to suggest that constraint is a source of strength.

Thus for Lavater, every individual is a self-contained entity and is different in some measure from everyone else. The purpose of physiognomy is to establish these tiny differences between individuals and therefore a rigorous process of comparison is involved, establishing the differences in minor traits from a multitude of subjects. Central to Lavater's character analysis is his concept of the detail. In his discussion of portraiture he upbraids artists for not paying due attention to minor traits: 'A quoi [...] nous sert la connoissance des proportions majeures, si nous négligeons d'étudier les traits subtils, qui sont tout aussi vrais, universels, précis et significatifs?' (II, 218). He believes that a survey of portraits will show just how negligent most portraitists are. They are likely to have 'une théorie générale de la bouche' without being aware of any of the finer points of the mouth's contour and colour. He calls on them to attend more closely to facial difference.

Lavater is keenly aware of a possible danger for the physiognomist, that different facial parts within the same face may have contradictory meanings. He finds that one of Raphael's heads, a paradigm of the expressive head which is found in many eighteenth-century drawing manuals as well as the *Encyclopédie*, displays a heterogeneity: its features do not fit together, but emit several different physiognomical meanings (II, 296). Judged according to empirical physiognomical rules, Raphael is a bad painter because, as Lavater observes, his noses are placed too close to the mouth and too far from the eyes. Only because Raphael is an artist of genius is he allowed to 'break the rules', for Lavater hails the Renaissance artist as 'un homme apostolique', as a model of perfection to other artists, his genius manifest in his beautiful, Christ-like face. Elsewhere Lavater is more critical, and tends to attribute what he sees as contradictions in facial parts as a fault of the artist. If artists knew more about physiognomy, he suggests, then they would not make such elementary mistakes.

Diderot, in his *Pensées détachées sur la peinture*, explores the same idea of contradictory meanings emanating from various body parts: 'Le point important de l'artiste, c'est de me montrer la passion dominante si fortement rendue, que je n'aie pas la tentation d'y en démêler d'autres qui y sont pourtant. Les yeux disent une chose, la bouche en dit une autre, et l'ensemble de la physionomie une troisième'.[42] Like Lavater, he suggests that the artist should be attuned to these different meanings lest the main message be undermined by other contradictory messages. Yet Diderot's starting point seems to be very different from that of Lavater, for he suggests that a cacophony of facial features is not wrong or disturbing, but actually is a true reflection of character. In the previous *pensée*, he discerns even more qualities in Euphranor's *Paris* than the three which he is famous for (judge of the three goddesses, lover of Helen and murderer of Achilles):

Je vois, dans sa physionomie, l'esprit, l'ironie, le cynisme, la brusquerie, la fausse douceur, l'envie, l'hypocrisie, la fausseté; et s'il fallait entrer dans le détail, je désignerais chaque trait de sa personne analogue à chacune de ces passions. Ce qui me conduit à croire que, si l'on cherchait une figure qui n'eût qu'un seul et unique caractère, peut-être ne la trouverait-on pas.[43]

Diderot questions the idea of unity of character, seeing the human subject as made up of multiple and contradictory elements and each feature affected by a different passion.

Yet for Lavater, such contradiction is out of keeping with his theory of character as a unified whole. Though he is aware that certain external events can disfigure the features, such as the effect of pain or illness, he insists that a significant detail can unlock this unified character. In other words, what is crucial in Lavater's foregrounding of the detail as an index of character is his holistic vision of bodily harmony.[44] The importance lies not, as some critics have suggested, in the selection of a random detail which necessarily sums up the whole self. Rather it lies in the selection of a *salient* detail, the metonym which most embodies the whole person.

Lavater's multifaceted physiognomy echoes, but also contradicts, many themes and images previously encountered in this book. He takes on board the empirical method and anthropocentrism of his predecessors, and expands on their theories of physiognomy as a skill of cultivated society. Yet in his conception of God as manifest in the forms of nature and of the secret language of physiognomy waiting to be discovered, his thinking comes close to the Renaissance cosmology which had been discarded many years before. The same is true of his presentation of the physiognomist as expert and his clothing of physiognomy in the language of mysticism. Lavater shares with Le Brun a minimal language of bodily forms but, unlike Le Brun, his language is endless, perpetually expanding in the constant hope of reaching the divine. In particular, Buffon's key argument — that *pathognomy* and not *physiognomy* is the only reliable index of the self — is refuted by Lavater. This is reflected in his aesthetics of stillness, influenced by Winckelmann, which stresses the quiet expressivity of shape and outline, and in his obsession with the minimalism of the silhouette and the individual feature. *Physiognomy* is also reflected in his theory of character as a fixed psychological whole which may be summed up by a single salient detail. This is in contrast to many theories of character examined in this book where the individual is made up of many shifting and contradictory elements.

NOTES

1. *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, 4 vols, (Leipzig, 1775-8). Despite the omission of the word 'Fragments' from the titles of French editions, I will refer to them by this label, for the fragment is crucial textually and thematically.
2. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister etc.*, ed. by Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols (1877-82), XIII, 200-10 (p. 201).
3. Siegfried Frey describes Lavater's 'ecstatic' reception among German literati: 'Lavater, Lichtenberg and the Suggestive Power of the Human Face', in *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johann Caspar Lavater*, ed. by Ellis Shookman (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), pp. 64-103.
4. Martine Dumont argues that Lavater borrows indiscriminately from both mechanism and vitalism in his work, but that this is not detrimental to its popular success: 'Le Succès mondain d'une fausse science: La Physiognomonie de Johann Kaspar Lavater', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 52/53 (1984), 2-30. Amateurs such as Madame Roland were exasperated by the lack of system: 'On cherche avidement une suite de propositions, de principes qui fassent la base de la science physionomique; on ne trouve que des descriptions, des portraits'. *Lettres de Madame Roland*, ed. by Claude Perroud (Paris, 1900-1902), I, 334. Lavater's work was also rejected as unscientific by both Hegel and Kant.
5. *Essai sur la physiognomonie, destiné à faire connoître l'homme et à le faire aimer*, 4 vols (La Haye, 1781-1803).
6. The definitive critical biography is still Olivier Guinaudeau's *Etudes sur Lavater* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1924).
7. See Charlotte Steinbrucker, *Lavaters Physiognomische Fragmente im Verhältnis zur bildenden Kunst* (Berlin: Wilhelm Borngräber, 1915), p. 90.
8. See John Graham's indispensable 'Lavater's Physiognomy: a Checklist', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 55 (1961), 297-308.
9. See O. Guinaudeau, 'Les Rapports de Goethe et de Lavater', *Etudes germaniques*, 4 (1949), 213-26.
10. See James R. Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1660-1800* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975).
11. See James R. Knowlson, 'The Idea of Gesture as a Universal Language in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 26 (1965), 495-508.
12. *Essays on Physiognomy* [...] *translated from the French by Henry Hunter*, 4 vols (London, 1789), I, 127.
13. For further details of Lavater's reception in France, see John Graham, *Lavater's Essays on Physiognomy: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1979), chapter 6.
14. *Correspondance littéraire*, XIII, 206.
15. *L'Année littéraire* 1786, VI, 333-37.
16. See for example, Clairier, *Le Tableau naturel de l'homme, ou Observations physiognomoniques* (Strasbourg, 1794); J. M. Plane, *Physiologie, ou l'art de connaître les hommes sur leur physionomie. Ouvrage extrait de Lavater* [...] *avec des observations sur les traits de quelques personnages qui ont figuré dans la révolution française* (Paris, 1797).
17. An *in-24* edition, entitled *Physionomie portative, d'après Lavater, les Pernety, et plusieurs autres célèbres physionomistes* appeared in 1806. One of the Pernetys is presumably Bougeant. *Le Lavater portatif* (Paris, 1808), ran to four editions.
18. *Tableaux de Paris*, 12 vols 2nd edn (Amsterdam, 1783-88), II, 169.
19. *De l'Allemagne*, 2 vols (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), II, 249.
20. See F. Baldensperger, 'Les Théories de Lavater dans la littérature française' in *Etudes d'histoire littéraire*, deuxième série (Paris: Hachette, 1910), pp. 51-91
21. See Owsei Temkin, 'Gall and the Phrenological Movement', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 21 (1947), 275-321; John B. Davies, *Phrenology: Fad and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).
22. Baldensperger, p. 60.
23. *Diderot en Allemagne 1750-1850* (Paris, 1954; repr. Geneva/Paris: Slatkine, 1986), p. 42.
24. The term 'translation loss' is borrowed from Ian Higgins and Sándor Hervey, *Thinking Translation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
25. See, for example, Morel D'Arleux's 1806 edition of Le Brun's lecture on animal physiognomy.
26. *Über Physiognomik, wider die Physiognomen. Zu Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, in *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. by Franz. H. Mautner (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1983), II, 94.

27. Christopher Rivers's assertion that Lavater's simultaneous insistence on the possibility and the impossibility of physiognomy is merely a rhetorical strategy fails to allow for the theological context within which Lavater is working. The human condition, and hence the physiognomical project, is defined by both its constant striving to achieve godliness and its constant awareness of failure to do so. *Face Values: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
28. Barbara Stafford, who depicts Lavater as resolutely 'Neo-Classical', trapping the body with mathematical certainty and over-schematisation, fails to acknowledge the element of genius in Lavater which transcends such prescriptive methodologies. The polysemic character of Lavater's *Fragments* cannot fully be reflected in the oppositional structure of her work. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 103-08.
29. Michael Shortland's argument that Lavater's physiognomy provides the conditions for 'the new art of seeing' which turns physiognomy from an art into a science seems implausible to say the least, for it was seen in Chapter 1 that the emphasis on heightened vision is already a fundamental part of eighteenth-century physiognomy. 'The Body in Question: Some Perceptions, Problems and Perspectives of the Body in Relation to Character c.1750-1830' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1984).
30. *Über Physiognomik*, II, 86.
31. Regrettably, no modern full-length study of Lavater's relationship with the visual arts has replaced and enhanced Steinbrucker's useful work. For some challenging modern approaches to certain aspects of the subject, see Marcia Allentuck, 'Fuseli and Lavater: Physiognomical Theory and the Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 55 (1967), 89-112; Willibald Sauerländer, 'Überlegungen zu dem Thema Lavater und die Kunstgeschichte', *Idea. Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle*, VIII (1989), 15-29; Joan K. Stemmler, 'The Physiognomical Portraits of Johann Caspar Lavater', *The Art Bulletin*, 75 (1993), 151-67.
32. Many portraits in the collection have an accompanying verse in hexameters describing the sitter, composed and hand-written by Lavater. This echoes the vogue for engravings accompanied by little moral verses, but also shows once again Lavater's exploitation of the vital properties of word and image. See Gustav Solar, 'Les Restes de la collection de J.C. Lavater à la Bibliothèque de Zurich', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 79 (1972), 151-61. Much of Lavater's collection is now in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Such collections of the portraits of famous people were a common eighteenth-century phenomenon, as Marcia Pointon has pointed out, though she denies any physiognomical interest, an argument which can scarcely hold in the case of Lavater. *Hanging the Head. Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1993), chapter 2. Gautier d'Agoty's *Galerie françoise ou Portraits des hommes et des femmes qui ont paru en France* (Paris, 1770) also ran to several editions.
33. *Le Beau idéal, ou l'art du concept*, exhibition catalogue: Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, no. 94, (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1989), p. 6.
34. Pernety and de Catt's speeches which were delivered between 1768 and 1770 can be found in the proceedings of the Berlin Academy under two titles, the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres* (1768 and 1769), and in the *Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres* (1770, 1771 and 1772). Full details are given in the bibliography at the end of this volume.
35. *Mes Souvenirs de vingt ans de séjour à Berlin*, 5 vols (Paris, 1804), V, 86-91
36. *Nouveaux mémoires* (1772), p. 450.
37. Ibid., p. 450.
38. Pernety's view is clearly very different from more recent sociological theories which regard role-playing as amoral. Erving Goffman's influential theory of human social behaviour argues that role-playing takes place in all spheres of life, with the implication that this cannot be seen as deception or invite moral condemnation. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).
39. *Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres* (1775), p. 389.
40. *Histoire de l'Académie Royale* (1769), p. 477.
41. *Nouveaux Mémoires* (1770), p. 422.
42. *Œuvres esthétiques*, ed. by Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1988), p. 819.
43. Ibid., p. 819.
44. The point is eloquently made by François Dagognet: *Faces, surfaces, interfaces*, (Paris: Vrin, 1982).

CONCLUSION

Physiognomy, I have demonstrated, is a constantly changing phenomenon, which readily adapts itself to the prevailing discourse of a discipline or a historical period. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the eighteenth century the relationships between external appearance and inner essence were viewed and articulated via common trends in Enlightenment thought. This involved a detachment from what were seen to be the superstitious beliefs of past ages, and an adaptation of physiognomical theories to a new conception of man as independent and self-determining. Physiognomy was seen as a spontaneous and universal human activity, an amusing parlour game for idle aristocrats, or a skill to be cultivated by the refined connoisseur. In a more serious guise, it formed part of contemporary debates on self-improvement and social harmony. An empirical basis is evident in much physiognomical activity of this time. Sensualist theories of physiognomics, where a person's qualities may be assessed according to the positive or negative perceptions of the beholder, were pervasive. Materialist physiognomics, where essence was linked to physiology rather than to an impalpable soul, is an unexpected and surprisingly rich area of study.

Lavater's physiognomy reflects many aspects of Enlightenment physiognomics: its empiricism, its man-centredness, its social impulse. But in other ways his work appears stark and odd against this background, with a strong tendency to mystify and obfuscate the subject and to set the physiognomist apart from the general public. Often the anti-rational aspects of Lavater's work have been seen as prefiguring Romanticism, but in fact the impulses behind Lavater's work go far back into the history of physiognomy, tending in particular towards the Renaissance model of correspondences which I outlined in Chapter 1. I prefer, therefore, to see his work as a curious rag-bag of theories old and new.

In the domain of aesthetics, Le Brun has been a most useful starting point for an analysis of the theory and practice of expression in eighteenth-century French painting. His work has been seen to encourage the didactic practice of head-drawing through pattern books and the tradition of copying masterworks. In a more indirect and intriguing way, his theories led to a telescoping of attention on the head and face at the expense of the body and of the more general expressive qualities of a painting. This emphasis on the head and face can be found not just in painting but also in certain acting styles. The head-centredness prevailed even within developing eighteenth-century theories of bodily expression and pantomime which on the surface would seem to give less attention to the face than to the body as a whole.

Le Brun provides a counter-position from which to view the aesthetics of the mid-eighteenth century. He came to represent the heroic 'male' passions with their hard, inflexible, mask-like contours. Even more striking is his stillness: his heads epitomise a frozen pathognomy which contrasts vividly with the multiplicity, flexibility and nuance advocated by theorists such as Watelet and articulated by practitioners such as La Tour. But despite this, eighteenth-century artists needed Le Brun because of his clarity: he provided a finite and universal code of facial expressions when the call to replicate the variety of nature seemed only to convey blurred messages.

The Prix Caylus epitomised the weaknesses of what 'Le Brun' had come to represent by the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact one can see a gradual detachment from Le Brun's schema at this time, most successfully achieved by Greuze. This is partly due to a general shift in aesthetics which can be traced back to the theories of Du Bos and which was restated by Diderot. The new aesthetic located the sphere of interest in the beholder's response to the art work. Hence, the expression of the passions in painting was concerned less with the unequivocal demonstration of passion by the artist and more with the passions of the beholder. One might see this development in terms of a shift in the balance between the artist's responsibility to provide clear messages and the beholder's responsibility to interpret them. Greuze's heads, with their perplexing blankness, challenge the beholder to interpret. They withhold meaning, and also demonstrate the inadequacy of lexical systems of the passions.

A further departure from Le Brun was the move towards the depiction of the inwardness of the human subject, which is seen in the work of Greuze and Vigée-Lebrun. Mental states became more important than physical ones. This vital shift from passion to mood had the effect of slowing down the passions so that they became assimilated with character. This was the converse of the position in the mid-eighteenth century when character was effectively 'speeded up' to meet the passions. Such a shift is taken to disturbing lengths in Fuseli's studies of brooding inwardness and pathological states of mind. The tortured inner self eventually finds its full expression in the early nineteenth century in Géricault's studies of 'monomanes' or individuals deranged by one overriding obsession such as gambling. In these there is a striking contrast between the subjects' docile expressions and their turbulent insides which is not as far removed from Greuze's blank female faces as would first appear.

Le Brun's lecture is characterised by its minimalism: the vocabulary of the passions is restricted; the facial parts are stripped down to thin, non-corporeal outlines. In the mid-eighteenth century, things could not have been more different, with fleshed out faces and colours, and the intrusion of physiology into art. Writers on both art and theatre were convinced that the

many shades of the passions needed to be made evident through recourse to as wide a range of techniques as possible. Yet there was a danger in this striving to maximise expression in that it became too literal, and no longer took account of indirect means, which were arguably more potent, to convey expression. Later, with Lavater, flesh and colour are once again stripped away, leading to another form of minimalism, similar to Le Brun's, yet even more extreme since the face is broken down into single traits, mere lines on the page. Also, in contrast to the mid-eighteenth century which saw expression in terms of explicitness, Neo-Classicism ushered in an aesthetics of restraint and concealment, evident in the bowed female heads of David's *Oath of the Horatii*.

Another series of extremes can be found in the degree of passions. In mid-century, the strong 'heroic' passions of Le Brun gave way for a brief period to an exploration of the moderate passions of Caylus and Greuze. Yet already in the 1760s, theorists such as Winckelmann, Lessing and Diderot were once again beginning to discuss the strong passions.

The issue of differentiation between facial types in art of this period has been seen to be highly problematic. The practice of copying heads after Le Brun and others often led to a rather limited repertoire, so that the same heads would appear with tedious repetition, yet at the same time nature seemed to offer an unlimited stock of facial types. But this limited repertoire at least meant that facial expressions were distinct and recognisable entities, whereas the endless detail of nature might hinder the presentation of clear messages to the beholder. Also, artists were taught to abstract from nature to reach a generalised ideal in facial type.

In the case of genre, an erosion of the distinctions between types of heads in this period is observable: the Prix Caylus was conceived for the requirements of history painting, yet use of the live model who represented the moderate passions actually came closer to portraiture. At the same time, artists such as Vigée-Lebrun used the *tête d'expression* to elevate their portraits to the rank of history painting. The vast number of indeterminate heads produced, among them Fragonard's *portraits de fantaisie*, which may or may not refer outwards to a real sitter, confound the status of portraiture as well as the notion of resemblance which was deemed to be its fundamental constituent. Greuze exploits this seemingly volatile situation in French painting: in his work, the facial mobility which was typical of the period is translated into the social sphere, for his heads are upwardly and downwardly mobile, circulating freely across social and generic boundaries.

Of various theories of character to emerge in eighteenth-century France, I have explored the many different facets of a *pathognomical* character. Such a concept, as I hope I have fully demonstrated, is not a contradiction in terms,

but is based on the notion that the fleeting passions constitute the essence of a person rather than any permanent characteristic. This essentially dynamic mode of character takes various forms: firstly, there is the idea of multiple character which is present in Bougeant's character sketch, and also in Diderot's 'cent physionomies diverses'. In such cases, the individual is never the same from one moment to the next, but is constantly in motion. The second of these forms, seen in Rousseau's *Emile*, is where character is built up gradually over time from experience of life and from the progressive weathering of the passions on the body. A somewhat different version of the *pathognomical* character occurs in the domain of the moderate, where passions and character are indistinguishable from one another because of their mildness. This can be seen in Caylus's exploration of the median region in his *concours* and also in contemporary theories of comedy. A variation on this theory is that character is acquired through venturing outwards from the 'norm' or centre, and this demonstrates Louis Van Delft's assertion that character is perennially defined according to an idea of place or location.[1] As such, the acquisition of character is a negative process, tempered by a horror of extreme, of caricature. In opposition to this *pathognomical* notion of character, there can also be found a *physiognomical* character which was propounded by Pernety, Formey and Lavater, where the individual operates within a predetermined sphere.

For the artist, the *pathognomical* character, constantly on the move, endlessly elusive, was a source both of fascination and frustration. This was not only a case of how to render movement within a static art work; it was also linked to a particular understanding of identity. Beaumarchais sees the shifting and multifarious quality of human nature as a creative spur as well as a means to transcend social determinism. Diderot's view is more contradictory: in some respects he revels in the notion of a constantly changing self, but at other times he sees the function of art as thwarted by the particularities of the individual case. His solutions are the shared identity and moral purpose of *condition* and the generalised, universal appeal of the *modèle idéal*.

One final issue in the discussion of character needs to be foregrounded: this is the shift during the period in question from character as epitomised by decorum, to character as epitomised by the detail. Le Brun's theory of expression is organised around the principle of decorum, the representation of objects and people in their most typical state, a view which is echoed by de Piles. Character is seen by them as a clearly defined entity which, as the work of Félibien reveals, is also inseparable from social rank. In the eighteenth century, decorum was undermined in several ways: Watelet exposes society's mask-wearing, and thus casts irreparable doubt on the idea that people can and must conform to their character and rank. Beaumarchais also destabilises the notion of rank. Yet the breakdown of decorum at this time was also hastened

by an increased emphasis on the detail. Instead of a distinct entity, character is envisaged by writers such as Diderot and Beaumarchais as an assemblage of details. At this time, character no longer consisted of things in their most typical state, but paradoxically, the essence of a person was thought to be summed up by one or many incidental parts. Yet detail is regarded differently by different writers. It is seen in terms of multitude and contradiction by Diderot and Beaumarchais, as evidence of the richness of human existence. In contrast, Lavater fights against the idea of contradictory detail and seeks the human essence in the metonymy of a single trait.

NOTES

1. *Littérature et anthropologie: Nature humaine et caractère à l'âge classique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), chapter 2.

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PLATE 1a. G. della Porta, *Bull Man*, from *La Physionomie humaine*, Rouen, 1660, p. 118
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

PLATE 1b. C. Le Brun, *Boar Man and Pig Man*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN*)

PLATE 2a. J. Parsons, *Sneering Woman*, from *Human Physiognomy Explain'd: in the Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion*, London, 1747, pl. 4
(*By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library*)

PLATE 2b. After J. Parsons, *The Expression of the Passions*, from Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, Paris, 1749–67, II, pl. 8
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

PLATE 3a. After C. Le Brun, *Le Mépris et la Haine*, engraved by Sébastien Le Clerc, Paris, (n.d.)
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

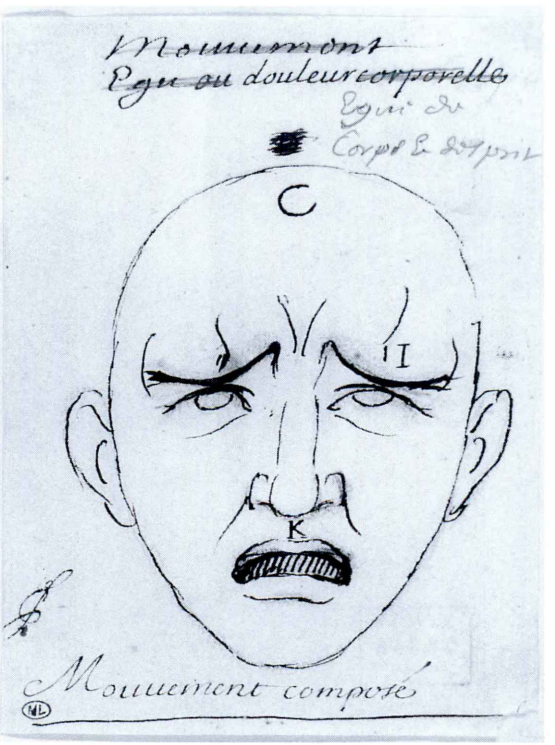

PLATE 3b. C. Le Brun, *Douleur aiguë du corps et d'esprit*,
Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN*)

PLATE 4a. After C. Le Brun, *La Crainte*, from Picart's edition of the *Conférence*, Amsterdam, 1702
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

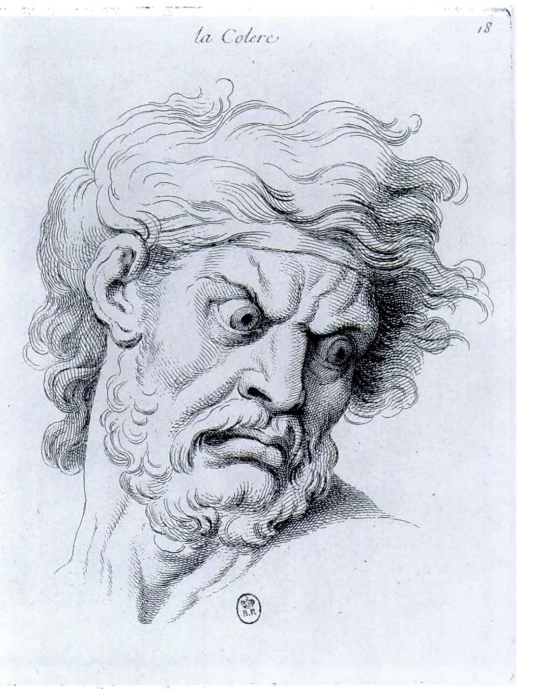

PLATE 4b. After C. Le Brun, *La Colère*, from Audran's edition of the *Conférence*, Paris, 1727
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

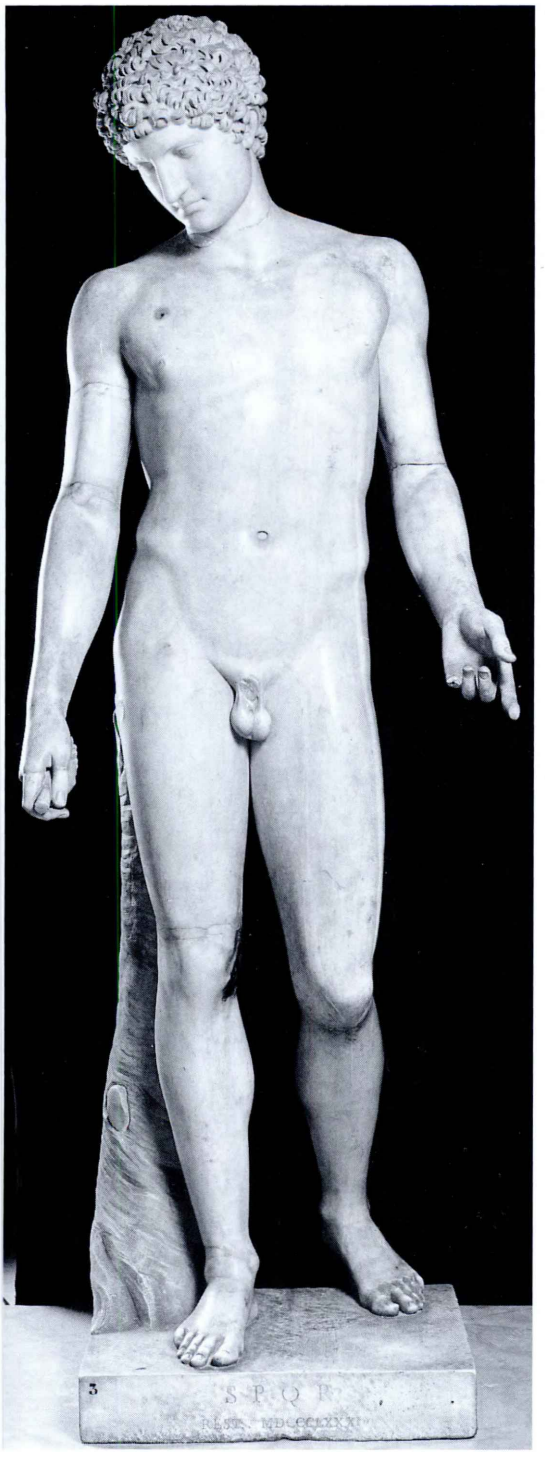

PLATE 5a (left). Statue of Hermes, known as *'Capitoline Antinous'*, Rome, Musei Capitolini
(*Photograph: Archivio Fotographico dei Musei Capitolini*)

PLATE 5b (above). After Raphael, *Head*, from C-A. Jombert, *Méthode pour apprendre le dessin*, Paris, 1755, pl. 30
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

PLATE 6a. P. P. Rubens, *L'Accouchement de la reine*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN, Jean/Lewandowski*)

PLATE 6b. M-Q. de La Tour, *Madame Masse*, Musée Antoine Lécuyer, St Quentin
(*Photograph: Agence Bulloz*)

PLATE 7a. M-Q. de La Tour, *Jean-Nicolas Vernezobre*, Musée Antoine Lécuyer, St Quentin
(*Photograph: Agence Bulloz*)

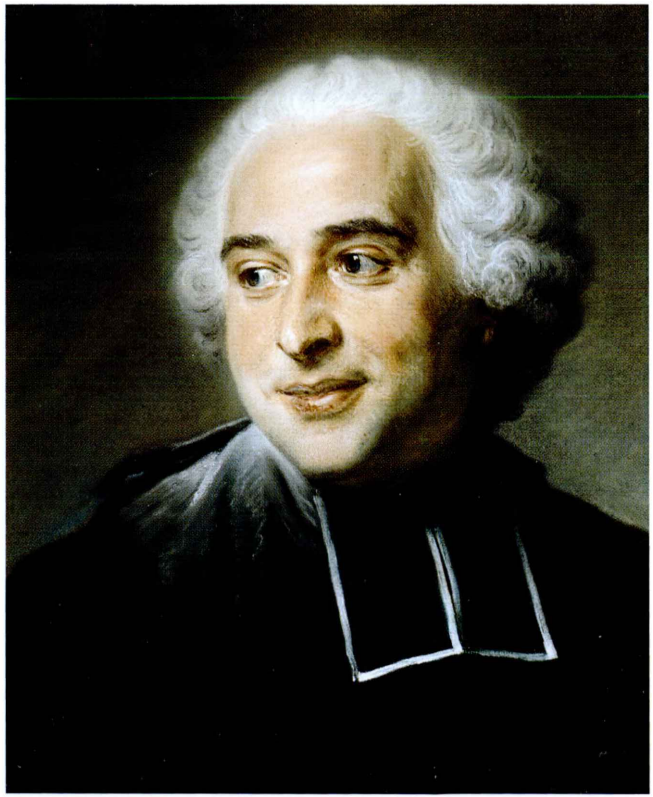

PLATE 7b. M-Q. de La Tour, *Abbé François-Emmanuel Pommyer*, Musée Antoine Lécuyer, St Quentin
(*Photograph: Agence Bulloz*)

PLATE 8a. M-Q. de La Tour, *Antoine-Gaspard Grimod de La Reynière*, Musée Antoine Lécuyer, St Quentin
(*Photograph: Agence Bulloz*)

PLATE 8b. J-L. David, *La Douleur*, prize-winning entry, Prix Caylus, 1773, Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris

PLATE 9a. M-H. Bounieu, *La Gaité*, prize-winning entry, Prix Caylus, 1762, Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris

PLATE 9b. A. Koukarsky, *La Compassion*, prize-winning entry, Prix Caylus, 1763, Ecole Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris

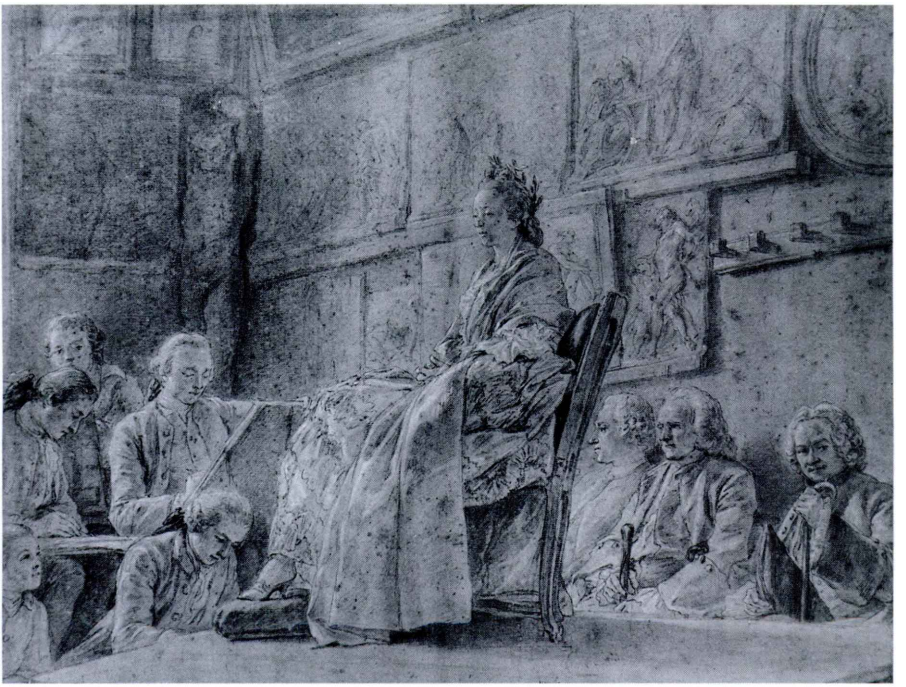

PLATE 10a. C-N. Cochin, *Concours pour le prix de l'étude des têtes et de l'expression*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN*)

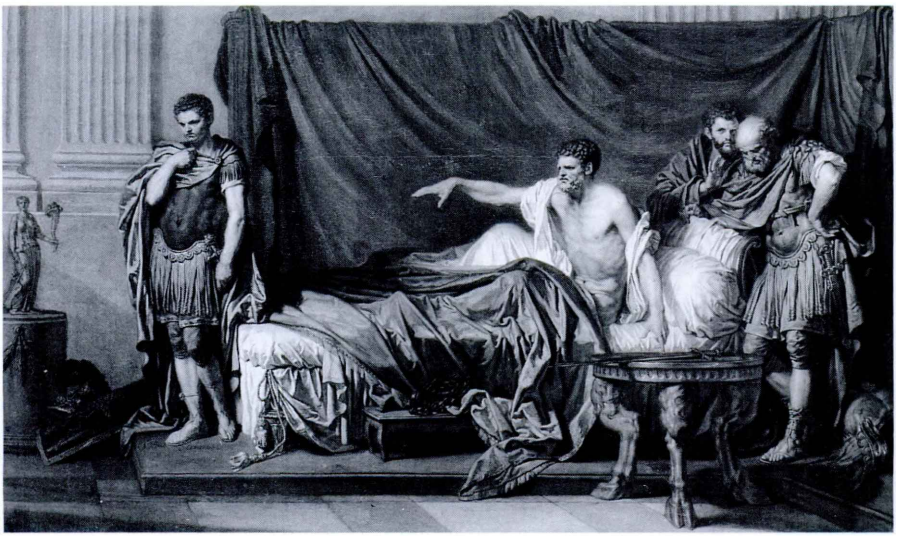

PLATE 10b. J-B. Greuze, *Septime Sévère et Caracalla*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN, R. G. Ojeda; P. Néri*)

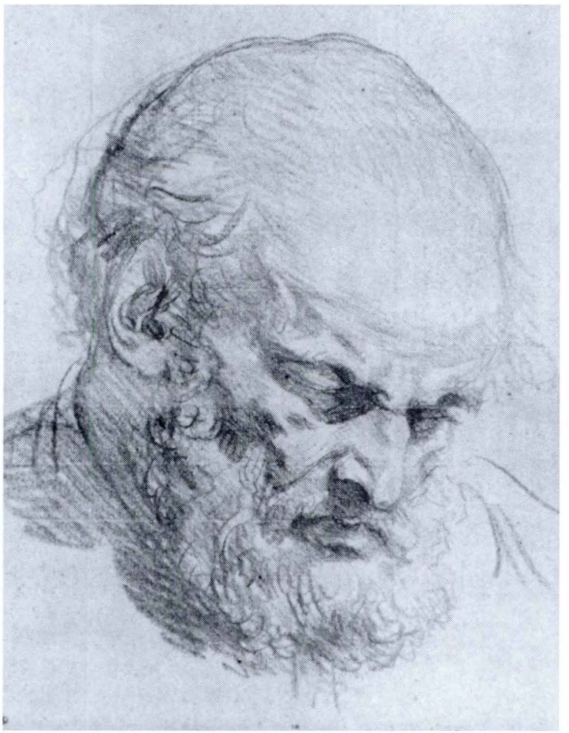

PLATE 11a. J-B. Greuze, preparatory sketch for *Septime Sévère*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph:* © *RMN*)

PLATE 11b. J-B. Greuze, *Le Gâteau des rois*, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

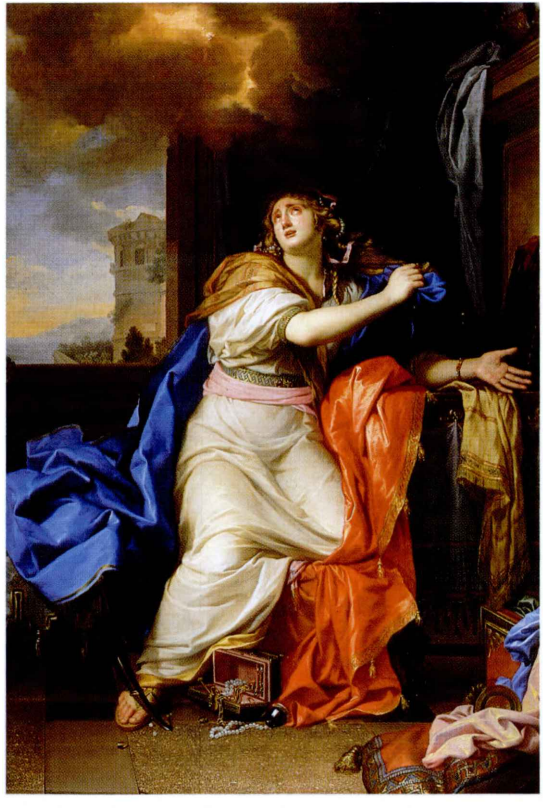

PLATE 12a. C. Le Brun, *La Madeleine pénitente*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN, Arnaudet; J. Schormans*)

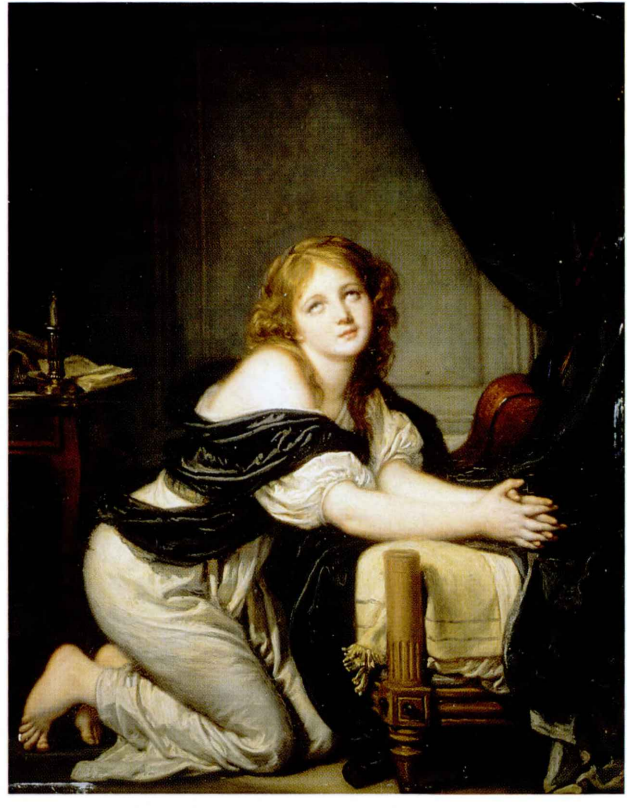

PLATE 12b. J-B. Greuze, *La Prière du matin*, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

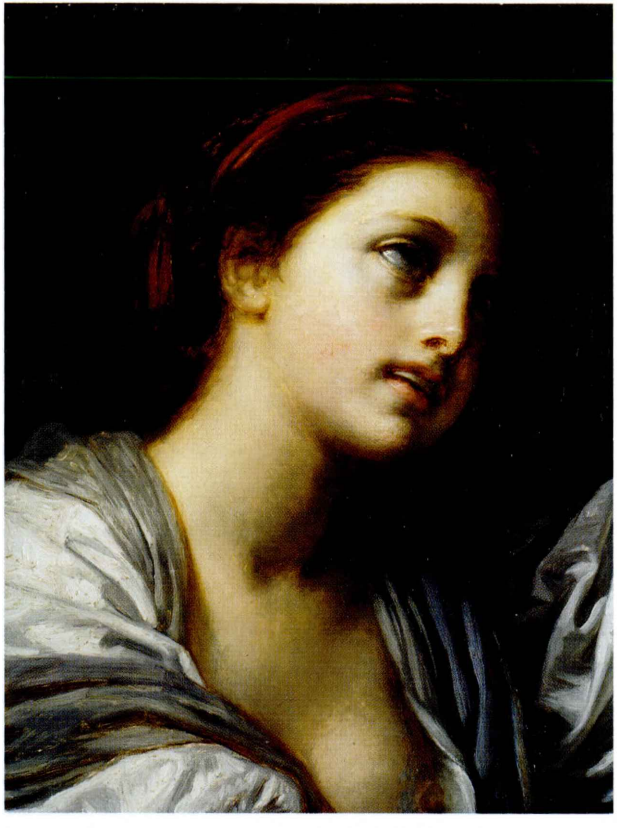

PLATE 13a. J-B. Greuze, *L'Admiration et le Désir*, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

PLATE 13b. C. Le Brun, *Le Ravissement*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph:* © *RMN*)

PLATE 14a. J-B. Greuze, *Joseph*, Louvre, Paris
(*Photograph: © RMN, C. Jean*)

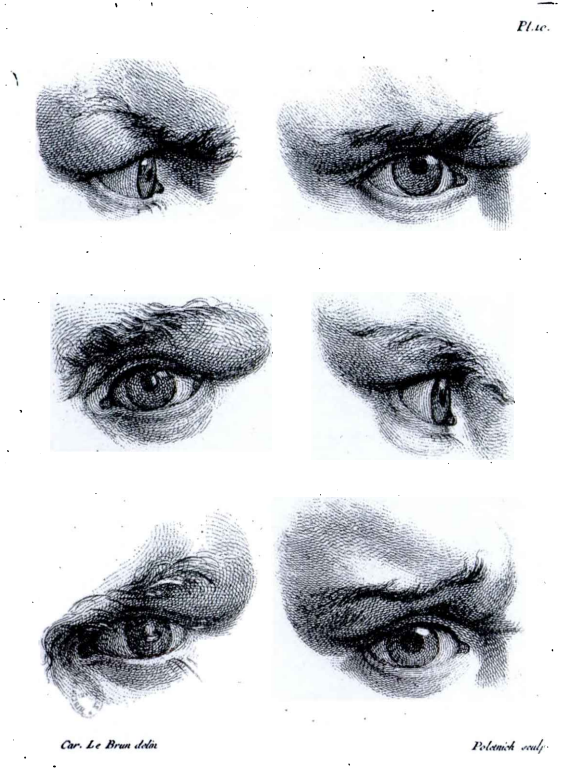

PLATE 14b. After C. Le Brun, *Eyes*, from C-A. Jombert, *Méthode pour apprendre le dessin*, 1755, pl. 10
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

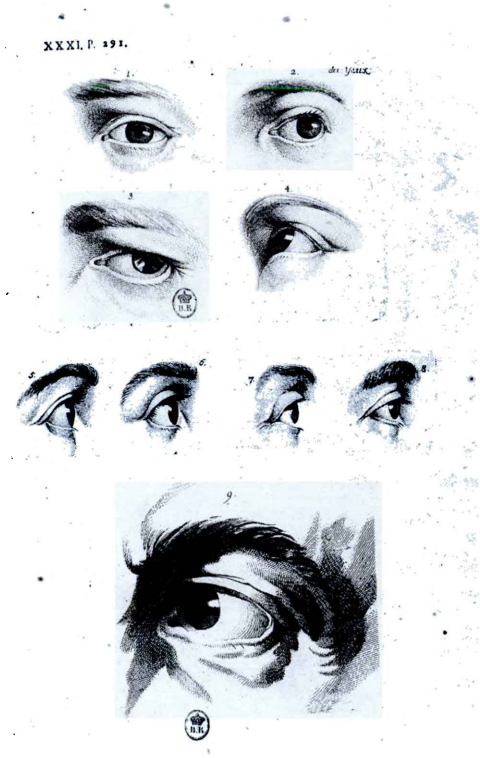

PLATE 15a. *Eyes*, from J. C. Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomonie*, La Haye, 1781–1803, III, pl. 31
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

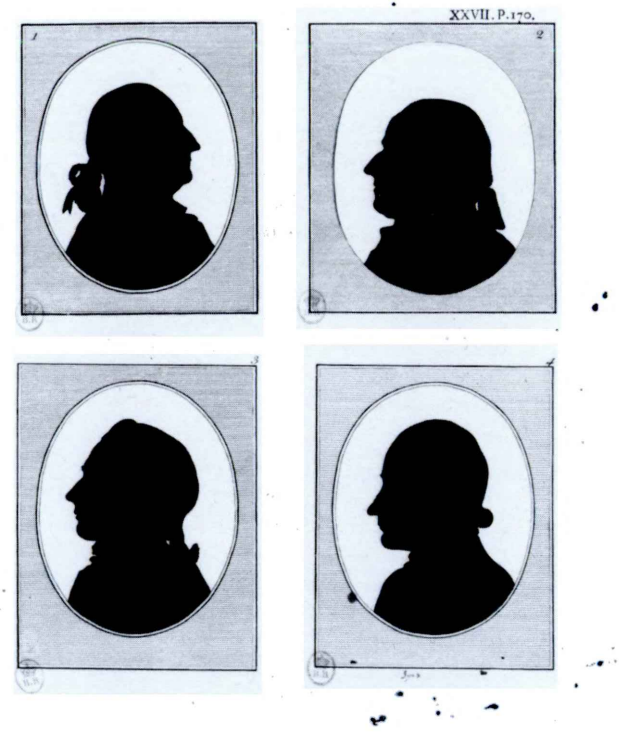

PLATE 15b. *Silhouettes*, from J. C. Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomonie*, II, pl. 38
(*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

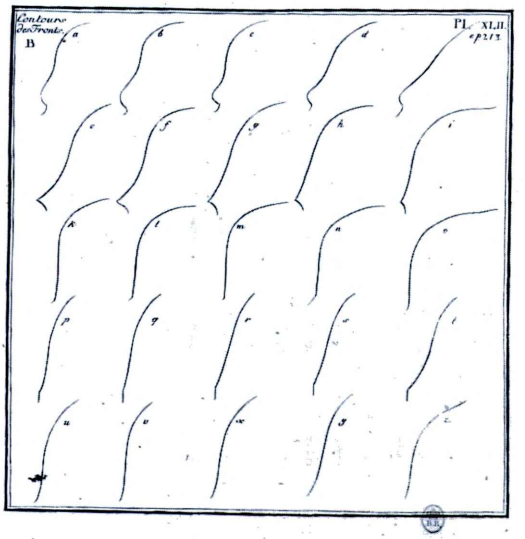

PLATE 16a. *Contours des fronts*, from J. C. Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomonie*, II, pl. 42 (*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

PLATE 16b. *Encircled Portraits*, from J. C. Lavater, *Essai sur la physiognomonie*, II, pl. 32 (*Photograph: Bibliothèque Nationale*)

PHYSIOGNOMY — the notion that there is a relationship between character and physical appearance — is often dismissed as a marginal pseudo-science; however, *The Appearance of Character* argues that it is central to many disciplines and thought processes, and that it constantly adapts itself to current patterns of thought and modes of discourse. This interdisciplinary study determines the characteristics of physiognomical thought in France during the previously neglected period leading up to the reception of Johann Caspar Lavater's physiognomy in the early 1780s. It establishes a corpus of physiognomical texts, juxtaposing 'mainstream' figures such as Buffon and Diderot with a host of minor writers. It then considers the representation of the passions in art, examining the legacy of Charles Le Brun, and revealing an aesthetics of facial representation where the passions are conceived in terms of multiplicity, speed, and nuance. The contribution of the Comte de Caylus to the development of the 'tête d'expression' is analysed, as well as the innovations of Greuze in the field of expression. Physiognomy in portraiture is also addressed through the work of La Tour. Facial expression in painting is found to have strong parallels with contemporary acting theory and stage practice. Finally, *The Appearance of Character* addresses the notion of character, outlining various predominant theories, and analysing the complex relationship between character and passions. In this respect, the study has ramifications for theories of the self and individualism in the Enlightenment and beyond.