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Condillac's Animated Statue and the Art of Philosophizing: Aesthetic Experience in the *Traité des sensations*

BY MANY INTERPRETATIONS, Condillac (1714–1780) exemplifies all that is reductive and positivistic in Enlightenment philosophy. Whether he is seen as a derivative thinker and a minor detour on the grand philosophical road from Descartes to Kant (a route that may allow some consideration of British empiricism),[1] or as a precursor to the Ideologues and the champion of a new ideal of transparent, pseudo-mathematical, anti-rhetorical philosophical language,[2] Condillac's writing has attracted relatively little critical attention. Both philosophy and literary criticism appear largely to

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[1] In his brief treatment of Condillac, Copleston sees him mainly as a follower of Locke and his contribution to philosophy as an apparent impasse produced by a hesitation between materialist and immaterialist theories of mind. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. 5: Hobbes to Hume* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959) 28–35. In the most extensive treatment of Condillac in English, Isabel Knight emphasizes the ambiguity of Condillac's thought, which she characterizes as an often puzzling mixture of the "pious" and the "radical," in *The Geometric Spirit: The Abbé de Condillac and the French Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968).

[2] See Wilda Anderson, "From Natural Philosophy to Scientific Discourse," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989) 460–64. Anderson identifies Condillac with the tradition of "positivist science," which emerged from a division within natural history; Diderot exemplifies the other direction taken, that of an "explicitly literary program" (461). Basing his authority on a "self-justifying rhetoric" characterized by "neutrality of tone and ... avoidance of literary mechanisms," Condillac is seen by Anderson as "the best model of the new style and rhetoric of scientific writing, a style recognizable to any reader of modern scientific texts" (464).

have disowned him: he is neither as incisive and influential as Locke and Hume, nor as readable and rich as Diderot and Rousseau.

This relative neglect is perhaps less due to a lack of interest than to the difficulty of placing Condillac's work in relation to the modern disciplines of philosophy and literature, a hesitation that is itself symptomatic of the reordering of knowledge in the mid-eighteenth century. Of all his works, the *Traité des sensations* best embodies the conflicting rhetorical modes of that peculiar, belletristic natural philosophy already on the wane when the text was published in 1754. In considering the figural language of the *Traité*, I will argue that Condillac makes use of metaphors and other analogies borrowed from the arts (most notably music, painting and sculpture) to supplement and complete his argument about the nature of the mind. Condillac's story of a statue brought to life through its senses, rather than inaugurating positivist anti-rhetoric and policing metaphors, represents a strategic use of the detours of figurative language and fiction in philosophical discourse.

Despite its reductive and explanatory goals, Condillac's philosophical fiction embodies a deliberately ambiguous model of human nature and its relation to the natural world. Condillac repeatedly appeals to "Nature" as his statue's guide and as the source of his principles. However, in order to bridge the gap between mind and matter, and subject and object, Nature must act as an "artifice," a construct that brings logical order and unites disparate elements into harmonious wholes. A rationalized and *aestheticized* natural order serves as the guarantee that the ideas in the mind both "make sense" and serve as reliable guides to the outside world. At the same time, the statue's success as an explanatory fiction ultimately depends on the limits of human knowledge: the mysteries of Nature and human life, and the wonder they produce, are called in to complete a system originally constructed to illuminate them. The statue can only become truly human by realizing the ultimate failure of its arts of knowing.

Analysis and Artifice: Representing the Understanding

The *Traité des sensations* purports to reduce the understanding, and by extension human nature, to a single universal principle: that all ideas, faculties and sentiments are merely sensations transformed and combined in different ways. In his introduction to the *Traité*, Condillac asks his reader to imagine a sensitive and curious

statue coming to its senses one by one and gradually awakening to life. He proposes controlling and observing the statue's education: along with smell, taste, hearing, sight and touch, the statue will receive stimuli of increasing complexity. Processing these sense impressions, it will progress from mere brute feeling to fully conscious knowledge of itself and the world.

The comparison of the system of sensation with an animated statue externalizes the operations of mind and makes them observable. Like the cross-section illustrations of machines in the *Encyclopédie*, the description of the statue allows us to visualize how something is put together in order to grasp how it functions.[3] The very representation of the statue serves as an experimental apparatus, isolating and rationalizing phenomena that normally escape our observation.[4] By analytically isolating the senses from each other, and controlling the sense impressions to which the statue is exposed, Condillac takes apart the human understanding and reconstructs it artificially.

The Music of the Mind

Condillac performs his analysis by reducing sensation to its basic law. The progress of the statue, he explains, is determined by its reactions to each individual sensation, a simple binary alternation between pain and pleasure:

> Le principe qui détermine le développement de ses facultés, est simple; les sensations mêmes le renferment: car toutes étant nécessairement agréables ou désagréables, la statue est intéressée à jouir des unes et à se dérober aux autres. Or, on se convaincra que cet intérêt suffit pour donner

[3] On the plates of the *Encyclopédie* as epistemological metaphor, see Daniel Brewer, "Ordering Knowledge," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Hollier, 447–55.

[4] Knight describes the statue as "a sort of frictionless machine—an ideal model from which all extraneous or interfering elements had been eliminated so that the relevant factors might be approached and studied in isolation. In this ideal model pure sensation was the psychological equivalent of momentum or force—i.e., a fundamental unit of experience abstracted out of the complex jumble of data that concrete experience presents to us" (84–85).

> lieu aux opérations de l'entendement et de la volonté.[5]

This "interest" of the statue is the law according to which it functions, just as bodies are moved by either attraction or repulsion: the desire for pleasure and the avoidance of pain are a natural instinct. The primacy of pleasure and the natural mechanism of desire take the place of any innate ideas or reason: "[c]'est par cet artifice que le plaisir et la douleur sont l'unique principe, qui déterminant toutes les opérations de son âme, doit l'élever par degrés à toutes les connaissances dont elle est capable."[6] This dramatic reduction of the human understanding to a simple binary principle is made possible only by "artifice," but this artifice is merely a clearer representation of a fundamental, unquestioned natural law. And, like Newton's laws of motion, this basic principle is sufficient to explain a large number of diverse phenomena. Thus, a simple binary opposition is repeated and complicated through the variety of the five senses. Like a musical theme and its variations, this complicating of the binary formula brings about all the richness of human experience: "le jugement, la réflexion, les désirs, les passions, etc., ne sont que la sensation même qui se transforme différemment."[7] The inevitable alternation between pain and pleasure governs the statue's entire universe and is the motor force of all experience.

Such is the basic set-up of the statue: the binary switch of quiescence and stimulation, the negative and positive values of pain and pleasure, and the hierarchical diversity of the senses. The sensory equipment of the body and the laws that govern its movement are tools provided by nature for creating ourselves and our

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[5] Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Traité des sensations* (Paris: Fayard, 1984) 11. Hereafter *Traité*. "The principle that determines the development of its faculties is simple; the sensations themselves contain it: for, as they are all necessarily pleasant or unpleasant, the statue has an interest in enjoying some and avoiding others. Now, it will become apparent that this interest suffices to produce the operations of the understanding and the will." (All translations are my own.)

[6] *Traité* 18. "It is by this artifice that pleasure and pain are the unique principle that, determining all the operations of its mind, must raise it by degrees to all of the knowledge of which it is capable."

[7] *Traité* 11. "Judgment, reflection, desires, passions, etc., are only sensation itself transformed differently."

experience: "La Nature nous donne des organes pour nous avertir ... ce que nous avons à rechercher ... [et] ce que nous avons à fuir. Mais elle s'arrête là; et elle laisse à l'expérience le soin de nous faire contracter des habitudes, et d'achever l'ouvrage qu'elle a commencé."[8] On the one hand, the statue, like ourselves, is determined by its nature, the structure of its body and the order of its senses; on the other, the experience that determines its ideas comes from outside. Nature provides the potential, which experience realizes. Thus it seems that nature, like the deist clockmaker-God, merely sets up laws and matter; from there, the system of understanding is self-generated through experience and an exploration of the world.

Condillac explains that the statue, his creation, will clearly demonstrate the simplicity of the laws of nature: "Cet objet est neuf, et il montre toute la simplicité des voies de l'auteur de la nature.... Peut-on ne pas admirer qu'il n'ait fallu que rendre l'homme sensible au plaisir et à la douleur, pour faire naître en lui des idées, des désirs, des habitudes et des talents de toute espèce?"[9] In creating his own, "new" object, and authoring his treatise, Condillac retraces the path of "l'auteur de la nature." No metaphysical presuppositions or innate ideas are necessary to explain human knowledge: we only need put ourselves in the place of the creator to understand the creation. Condillac proposes to demonstrate the simple truth of sensation by taking on a godlike role: he will set up his statue and create a world for it, exposing it only to positive and negative impressions in order to "faire naître" a whole human being in all of its complexity.

Thus the statue is an instrument not only for modeling perception, but for producing a human subject. But Condillac's simplification of the understanding makes the statue appear to be a mere machine for registering, collecting and combining sensations. How

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[8] *Traité* 12. "Nature gives us organs to alert us ... what we ought to pursue ... and what we ought to flee. But she stops there; and she leaves to experience the task of making us form habits, and of finishing the work she has started."

[9] *Traité* 12. "This object is brand new, and it shows all the simplicity of the ways of the author of nature .... How can one not admire that it was only necessary to make man sensitive to pleasure and pain, in order to bring into being ideas, desires, habits and talents of all sorts in him?"

will such basic input yield such sophisticated results? How will the statue come to consciousness and a sense of self? A passage from Condillac's *Logique*, in which he compares the system of sensation to a harpsichord, is illuminating: "Les organes extérieurs du corps humain sont comme les touches, les objets qui les frappent sont comme les doigts sur le clavecin, les organes intérieurs sont comme le corps du clavecin, les sensations ou les idées sont comme les sons."[10] Although the harpsichord appears to model perception through a mechanical reduction, the sensory body is a mere instrument, secondary to the ideas produced. Thought and feeling are insubstantial vibrations, whose logic is a sort of musical harmony. More than a mechanical process, perception attains the dignity of a work of art; the image of the harpsichord implies that the senses and the mind are not designed simply to produce random noise, but rather, beautiful and harmonious music.

The statue, like the harpsichord, becomes a work of art when animated. The aesthetic excess of this comparison suggests that the "natural" order of experience has been replaced by a higher, more artful ordering intelligence. But where does the harmony and melody come from? A musical instrument is brought to life by the skill and intelligence of the performer who plays it. But the statue, like the sensory harpsichord, is "played" by objects in the form of sense impressions. What assures that the thoughts produced by mind have an order and logical relation? To what extent is this order built into the machine and to what extent does it come from the outside? Such is the dilemma of Condillac's sensationalist project. Refusing both materialist determinism and the metaphysical presuppositions of Cartesian innate ideas, Condillac must explain how physical impressions on the senses become ideas in the mind.[11] The exact nature of the analogy between material objects

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[10] Condillac, *Logique*, in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Georges Le Roy (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947) 11. "The exterior organs of the human body are like the keys, the objects that strike them are like fingers on the keyboard, the interior organs are like the body of the harpsichord, the sensations or ideas are like the sounds."

[11] On the relation of Condillac to materialism, see Sylvain Auroux, "Condillac, Inventeur d'un nouveau materialisme," *Dix-huitième siècle* 24 (1992): 154–63, and in the same issue, Gianni Paganini, "Psychologie et Physiologie de l'entendement chez Condillac" 165–78.

and mental entities being unknown, Condillac can only explain the analogical mind/body relation through further analogies, like that of the harpsichord or the animated statue.[12] The statue becomes a whole, conscious human being through complex experience, accumulating and combining an increasing diversity of ideas. Analogy allows connections between these sensations and ideas: the analysis of the senses and faculties thus ends in a merging of the perspectives and points of view represented by the different senses. The statue gradually develops into a thinking subject capable of reconciling the diversity of its sensations and ideas into a synthetic order.

Difference and Repetition: The Art of Memory

The narrative of the statue's development is thus structured by both an expansive differentiation of sensation, ideas and senses, and the repetition of the same basic law of pain and pleasure that determines all its experience. The continuity of the statue's different states of being, and the influence of the structuring principle of pleasure unify what would otherwise be a mere collection of impressions and ideas. Memory allows the statue to collect and organize its experiences.

At first, it is Condillac who "plays" the statue. By providing carefully ordered experience, he produces ever more complex melodies of thought and brings forth the associative harmonies of the mind. Oscillating between pain and pleasure, the statue can only compare its various states of being and attempt to remember them. In order to create a synthetic unity out of this increasing diversity of mere sensations Condillac appeals to models borrowed from such artifices as music, painting, sculpture and language. Thus he begins by exposing the statue to a variety of different odours to see what knowledge it can gain from that sense alone. The statue comes to life in a garden of fragrant flowers: the pleasures of smell

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[12] Derrida exposes the workings of this *analogique* in Condillac's works, especially the earlier *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, in *L'archéologie du frivole* (Paris: Galilée, 1973). His deconstruction of the various oppositions that have been used to read Condillac hinges in part on a tension between, and overlap of, identity and difference: the progress of the understanding occurs through minimal, productive differences within the repetitions and reproductions of analogy.

and the pain of their evanescence form the statue's first desires, needs, memories and imaginings. From simple odours, the statue comes to desire a whole bouquet and appreciate the subtle art of perfumery.

Whereas the stimuli for smell were the simple odours of individual flowers and some limited combinations, with hearing the objects of perception are more complexly ordered from the start. Here too he gives pleasure to the statue: the objects of smell were a rich and luxurious assortment of flowers; to train its ear, he plays its beautiful music. In his discussion of hearing, Condillac distinguishes between noise (*bruit*) and sound or tone (*son*). Noise, like an inextricable mixture of different odours, is so chaotic that it offers no information; on the contrary, the ear clearly perceives tones and their harmonic relations from the start: "l'oreille est organisée pour saisir un rapport déterminé entre un son et un son."[13] In a rare mention of the anatomical and physiological determinations of sensation, Condillac explains that the *fibres* in the ear are organized in such a way as to perceive relations between tones. Though the mechanism of the ear is capable of advanced distinctions, the statue must still learn to judge what it hears. Nonetheless, he claims, it is natural for the statue itself to prefer melodies to mere noise; a sense of harmony is built into its ears. Because of the nature of sound and the ear, the relation between tones is much stronger than that between odours; thus a succession of sounds is more easily remembered and more naturally desired: "les plaisirs de l'oreille consistent principalement dans la mélodie, c'est à dire, dans une succession de sons harmonieux ... [l]es désirs de notre statue ne se borneront donc pas à avoir un son pour objet, et elle souhaitera de redevenir un air entier."[14] The statue naturally desires more complex stimuli and aesthetic experience.

This aesthetic *parti pris* is based on the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived: clear perception of sound occurs

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[13] *Traité* 60. "The ear is organized to capture a certain relationship between one sound and another."

[14] *Traité* 61. "The pleasures of the ear consist principally of melody, that is, of a succession of harmonious sounds.... The desires of our statue will thus not be limited to having as their object a sound, and it will wish to experience an entire melody repeatedly."

when there is a harmonic resonance between the impression and the organ. This, apparently, is the source of the pleasure in hearing. But there are deeper resonances as well: "Plus propres à émouvoir que les odeurs, les sons donneront, par exemple, à notre statue cette tristesse, ou cette joie, qui ne dépendent point des idées acquises, et qui tiennent uniquement à certains changements qui arrivent au corps."[15] The primal emotional power of music originates in an immediate corporal sensation: it is of the body and not a product of the mind, arising, for example, from music's ability to imitate various natural sounds. The pleasures of music do not depend on acquired ideas, though the sense of hearing can be trained to distinguish increasingly complex melodies. The statue is naturally and intuitively a sensitive listener: rather than simply being or hearing sounds and forming ideas from them, it is moved from the start.

The advent of sound and music brings with it a literary allusion: "Elle sera comme l'écho dont Ovide dit: *sonus est qui vivit in illa*; c'est le son qui vit en elle. Ainsi nous la transformerons, à notre gré, en un bruit, une son, une symphonie."[16] By citing Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Condillac adds literary prestige to his own exercise in transformation. The allusion to the myth of Echo, along with the fantasy of transforming the statue into a symphony, bring into relief the almost divine authority of Condillac's fiction. He is an artist like Ovid, that ancient writer famous for the transmission of erotic and moral knowledge; he aims to instruct while pleasing the reader with such rhetorical ornaments as these. However, the reference to Ovid is relevant in another sense, for it is in the same work, the *Metamorphoses*, that Ovid tells the story of Pygmalion. Condillac never mentions Pygmalion, even as his treatise is a rewriting or echo of this myth. Making the statue into a symphony is the sonic equivalent of sculpting its beautiful body from stone.

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[15] *Traité* 62. "More moving than odors, sounds will communicate to our statue, for example, that sadness, or that joy, that do not depend on acquired ideas, and originate uniquely in certain changes occurring in the body."

[16] *Traité* 59. "It will be like the echo, of which Ovid writes: *sonus est qui vivit in illa*; it is sound that lives in her. Thus we will transform the statue, as we desire, into a noise, a sound, a symphony."

Painting as a Metaphor for Sight

Just as it is presented with songs and symphonies to train its hearing, the objects it looks upon, and whose parts it must distinguish, are so many *tableaux*. The objects of sight, like those of hearing, are differentiated groupings of sense impressions that are first analyzed into constituent parts and then perceived as unified wholes. Condillac repeatedly compares the statue's attempts at seeing to examining and interpreting a painting; just as we have a difficult time looking at a painting that is new to us, straining to put into perspective what is obvious to the painter, the statue looks upon the world as a confused mass of unfamiliar shapes: "Il est vraisemblable qu'elle est par rapport à deux ou trois couleurs qui s'offrent à elle avec quantité d'autres, comme nous sommes nous-mêmes par rapport à un tableau un peu composé, et dont le sujet ne nous est pas familier.... Un peintre et moi nous voyons également toutes les parties d'un tableau: mais tandis qu'il les démêle rapidement, je les découvre avec tant de peine, qu'il me semble que je voie à chaque instant ce que je n'avais point encore vu."[17] Comparing the statue's laborious use of its new eyes to what we experience before a complex and unfamiliar painting serves to defamiliarize normal vision, making us aware of the judgments we make without noticing and take for granted: "Qu'on nous offre un tableau fort composé, l'étude que nous en faisons, ne nous échappe pas ... ce n'est qu'après toutes ces opérations, que nous les embrassons d'un même coup d'oeil."[18] It is only through art that we can perceive the constructedness of what we otherwise take to be natural and unproblematic. Looking at a work of art thus becomes the model for the work of looking in general, just as the fiction of the statue is meant of inform us about our own understanding.

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[17] *Traité* 77. "It is likely that the statue relates to two or three colors that present themselves to it with a quantity of others, like we ourselves relate to a somewhat complex painting, whose subject is not familiar to us .... A painter and I see equally well all the parts of a painting; but whereas he deciphers them quickly, I sort them out with such effort, that it seems to me that at each moment I see something that I have not yet seen."

[18] *Traité* 84. "If we are presented with a very complex painting, it does not escape our attention that we must study it .... It is only after all of these operations that we can see its parts together in a glance."

Different faculties and senses allow the statue to order its experience, binding together disparate sensations into meaningful wholes. However, this cognitive order is limited to a mere continuity in succession and simple comparisons. The statue is naive and inexperienced; it needs to learn to use its senses to rise to a level of more complex experience. The order and disposition of the objects we perceive in the world corresponds to the temporal and spatial structure of sense experience. But without innate ideas or the appeal to some sort of structuring function in the mind, it is hard to explain what orders perceptions of distinct unities. Considering the basic input of hearing through the art of music and those of sight through painting legitimates a certain idea of a rational order in the world that corresponds to the nature of senses. The objects of hearing and vision are structured so as to advance the statue's knowledge through pleasure. Condillac's artificial nature, like the real thing, has many charms.

The Statue's Strange Ignorance: The Menace of Idealism

However complex the statue's ideas may become, without the sense of touch, it has no notion of a world outside its sensations; it simply is what it feels, it does not even know that it has a body. In the first part of the treatise, Condillac argues that neither smell, taste, hearing nor sight can in themselves give us an idea of the existence of a world outside of us. In its blank ignorance and with only these four senses, the statue cannot distinguish between pleasures and pains that belong to the body (*plaisirs sensibles*), and those that belong to memory and mental faculties (*plaisirs intellectuels ou spirituels*). This strange failure on the part of the statue, what to us appears as an error, is in fact enlightening: "Cette ignorance la garantira d'une erreur que nous avons de la peine à éviter: car ces sentiments ne diffèrent pas autant que nous l'imaginons. Dans le vrai, ils sont tous intellectuelles ou spirituelles, parce qu'il n'y a proprement que l'âme qui sente."[19] The statue's limitation arises from the fact that it simply feels sensations without having learned to assign them to external causes; it experiences them as modifica-

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[19] *Traité* 25. "This ignorance will protect it from an error that we have much trouble in avoiding: for these sensations do not differ as much as we imagine. In truth, they are all intellectual or spiritual, because properly speaking, only the mind feels."

tions of its own being. Condillac presents this strange state of affairs as a real philosophical revelation: "La philosophie fait un nouveau pas: elle découvre que nos sensations ne sont pas les qualités mêmes des objets, et qu'au contraire elles ne sont que des modifications de notre âme."[20] Even as it ignores the existence of its own body and an outside world, the statue's solipsistic state reveals an important philosophical truth.

Showing what ideas the statue can have even in ignorance of its own body and the outside world not only demonstrates that sensations are mental phenomena, but proves that it is not necessary to appeal to material causes: "Que les philosophes à qui il parait si évident que tout est matériel, se mettent un moment à sa place, et qu'ils imaginent comment ils pourraient soupçonner qu'il existe quelque chose qui ressemble à ce que nous appelons *matière*."[21] Condillac is not claiming that the material world does not exist; he is just showing that one is not obliged to appeal to material causes to explain the origin of ideas in the mind.

The statue's limited state symbolizes a philosophical dilemma and creates significant epistemological problems for the statue. It is unable to distinguish between present sensations and the powerful memory of a past sensation. Memories may impress themselves on its mind more powerfully than what it is currently experiencing.[22] For the statue at this phase, there is no difference between imagining a sensation based on past experience and having the sensation; furthermore, it cannot distinguish the sensations of dreams from those of the waking state. Left to its own devices without touch, the statue would become merely a bundle of sensations past and present: "Son *moi* n'est que la collection des sensations qu'elle éprouve, et de celles que la mémoire lui rappelle."[23] The addition of new senses leads to an exponential expansion of expe-

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[20] *Traité* 74. "Philosophy makes a new advance: it discovers that our sensations are not the actual qualities of objects, but that on the contrary, they are only modifications of our mind."

[21] *Traité* 16. "If only those philosophers to whom it appears so obvious that everything is material were to put themselves in the place of the statue, how would they imagine that they could suspect that something exists that resembles what we call *matter*?"

[22] *Traité* 19.

[23] *Traité* 56. "Its self is nothing but the collection of the sensations it experiences and of those that memory recalls."

rience, and thus the statue's all-encompassing *moi*. With vision, its boundaries become limitless: Ale *moi* de la statue ne saurait se sentir circonscrit dans des limites. Il est à la fois toutes les couleurs qui le modifient en même temps .... Il lui semble qu'il se répète sans fin ... il est partout, il est tout."[24]

The only sense of self it has comes from a succession of sensations, memories and imagined perceptions. If it is first a colour and then we expose it to odours, tastes and sounds, in a sort of synesthetic identity, it will see itself as a colour that is successively odiferous, savory and sonorous. Condillac also speculates that it would define its sense of self by the first impression it had experienced, or the most habitual sensation: "Car c'est dans la manière d'être ou elle se retrouve toujours, qu'elle doit sentir ce *moi* qui lui parait le sujet de toutes les modifications dont elle est susceptible."[25] Even as the senses are multiplied in this initial phase and the statue's experience becomes ever more diverse, they are contained within a solipsistic universe: "il lui semble qu'elle aperçoit en elle une multitude d'êtres tout différents. Mais elle continue à ne voir qu'elle .... Elle voit, elle sent, elle goûte, elle entend, sans savoir qu'elle a des yeux, un nez, une bouche, des oreilles: elle ne sait pas qu'elle a un corps."[26] Its sense of self is simultaneously diverse, defined by exterior stimuli and ideas of ever-increasing complexity, and narrow and passive, with true self-consciousness; its feelings and reactions to feelings are everything to it.

The statue's solipsism is equivalent to the idealist position that claims that "nous n'apercevons rien qu'en nous-mêmes."[27] Condillac himself made this claim in his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, provoking a sharp criticism from Diderot.[28]

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[24] *Traité* 81–82. "The self of the statue would not be able to feel itself circumscribed by limits. It is simultaneously all the colors that modify it at the same time ... it seems to itself that it repeats endlessly .... it is everywhere, it is everything."

[25] *Traité* 88. "For it is in the manner of being to which it always returns that the statue must feel that self that seems to it the subject of all the modification to which it is susceptible."

[26] *Traité* 87. "It seems to it that it sees in itself a multitude of completely different beings. But it continues to only see itself .... It sees, it smells, it tastes, it hears, without knowing that it has eyes, a nose, a mouth, or ears: it does not know that it has a body."

[27] *Traité* 74. "We perceive nothing but that which is in ourselves."

[28] Condillac published his *Essai* in 1746. Diderot's critique of Condillac's apparent agreement with Berkeley appears in his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749).

The true difficulty for his sensationalist approach lies in demonstrating the existence of a world outside our sensations, and explaining "comment nous contractons l'habitude de rapporter au-dehors des sensations qui sont en nous .... Comment le sentiment peut-il s'étendre au-delà de l'organe qui l'éprouve et qui le limite?"[29] It is only with touch that the statue will be able to discover a space outside itself and "teach" the other senses to connect their sensations to bodies in this space.

Condillac brings his statue a whole world of sensations—flowers, music, fine cuisine, and complex paintings—but still it does not come to life, or come into its own. It remains utterly dependent on and ignorant of its philosophical protector, not to mention the world outside he has created. With no sense of itself as a subject in the world, in relation to other objects and subjects, the statue remains a mere echo of whatever it is given.

Touch: Sculpting the Self

With the sense of touch, the statue's world is doubled in a new, fundamental way. Instead of being everything it feels, the statue discovers that it has a body and that other bodies exist outside of itself. Its world becomes divided by a new opposition, between self and other: it will begin to actively explore both. Touch opens up new worlds of pleasure, and when united with the other senses, enables the statue to seek what it desires. This knowledge of itself and control of its surroundings emerge at first from an admiration and understanding of their design: just as its body comes to life under its hands, its world is formed through both wondering contemplation and artful experimentation

In order to navigate and survive in the world, the statue must somehow separate itself from what it feels and create a body for itself. A habitual misidentification of the self with the body is necessary for the negotiation of daily existence in the world of objects. Survival in the material world depends on a sort of fiction, "cet artifice, par lequel nous croyons nous trouver dans des organes qui ne sont pas nous proprement."[30] This useful misconception,

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[29] *Traité* 88. "How do we contract the habit of projecting outside the sensations that are in us .... How can feeling stretch itself outside of the organ that experiences and limits it?"

[30] *Traité* 99. "that artifice by which we believe that we are located in organs that are not properly speaking ourselves."

like the informative fiction of the statue, relies on a conscious and distanced perception of the body's physical "mechanism," that instrument that has been "chosen" and "ordered" by nature in relation to the mind or soul. The statue must take this potentially deceptive corporal self-image for reality in order to "see" itself: only by mistakenly identifying itself with its body can it come to understand that it is not itself the entire world, but rather a finite being in a material world. It must become an object to itself, something it can identify and observe. Only by this "artifice" of self-representation can it isolate its body from its surroundings, and experimentally determine its form, limits and capabilities.

Perhaps aware that this miraculous emergence of self-consciousness through touch resembles a rhetorical sleight of hand, Condillac calls in "Nature" as a sort of *deus ex machina* to aid the statue in analyzing this self that appears to be located in its body: "Or il est certain qu'elle ne fera pas cette analyse toute seule: c'est donc à la Nature à la lui faire faire. Observons."[31] Guided by "Nature," the statue discovers its body. This self-recognition is represented as a conversation between different parts of the body: "aussitôt qu'elle porte la main sur [une des parties de son corps], le même être sentant se répond en quelque sorte de l'une à l'autre: *c'est moi.* Qu'elle continue à se toucher ... partout aussi le même être sentant se répondra de l'une à l'autre: *c'est moi, c'est moi encore!*"[32] Through a feedback loop, in which the hand communicates with the rest of the body, the statue forms a tactile representation of itself. The discovery of other bodies occurs by the same mechanism; the statue reaches the limits of itself when it touches and receives no response.

The discovery and recognition of its body takes the form of a self-creation, as the statue literally sculpts itself out of space: "s'il lui arrive de conduire sa main le long de son bras, et sans rien franchir, sur sa poitrine, sur sa tête, etc., elle sentira, pour ainsi dire, sous sa main, une continuité de *moi*; et cette même main, qui

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[31] *Traité* 98. "Now, it is certain that it will not undertake this analysis on its own: it is thus up to Nature to make it do it. Let us observe."

[32] *Traité* 105. "As soon as it places a hand on [one of the parts of its body], the same feeling being replies, as it were, from one part to the other: *it's me.* If it continues to touch itself ... everywhere the same feeling being also replies from one part to the other: *it's me, it's still me!*"

réunira, dans un seul continu, les parties auparavant séparées, en rendra l'étendue plus sensible."[33] Only by recognizing itself as a statue, finely composed and harmoniously proportioned, does Condillac's creation come to know itself. Though the statue is guided by nature in this discovery, Condillac implies that self-identity ultimately depends on a linguistic or symbolic mediation. Becoming a sculpture, like having a conversation with itself, is a form of representational self-creation.

Touch and Vision: The World as Canvas

The integration of touch and vision is the most important partnership formed by the senses. Touch "corrects" potentially deceptive visual images. Sight and touch interact in judgments about distances and the relative size of objects. Condillac represents the dependence of sight on touch by a comparison with painting. The "brush" of the eye is guided by the "stick" of touch. Just as it earlier sculpted its body out of space, the statue now "paints" a world by projecting visual sensations onto the objects of touch: "la main ... fixant successivement la vue sur les différentes parties d'une figure, les grave toutes dans la mémoire: c'est elle qui conduit, pour ainsi dire, le pinceau ... elle dessine devant [les yeux] une surface, dont elle marque les bornes."[34] The statue assigns things their proper size and place in the field of vision with the help of touch, just as a painter constructs a visual field with brush and paint. That the statue comes to know itself as a sculpture and the world as a painting reveals that knowledge and self-knowledge must be mediated by a system of signs. The interposition of these fanciful metaphors takes the place of a missing element in Condillac's theory of mind; he cannot explain by his principles alone how the understanding actively creates ideas as meaningful representations from mere sense impressions.

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[33] *Traité* 104. "If it happens that it moves its hand the length of its arm and, without missing anything, over its chest, its head, etc., it will feel under its hand, so to speak, a continuity of self; and this same hand, which will unite into a single continuity parts that were previously separated, will make the extension of the whole more sensitive."

[34] *Traité* 176. "The hand ... fixing sight on the different parts of a figure, engraves all of them in the memory: the hand moves, so to speak, the brush ... it draws before the eyes a surface, whose limits it marks."

The statue's world obeys regular laws and is arranged in a coherent relational order. The artful decor of the statue's world may appear to be a mere rhetorical effect, a fanciful insistence on the part of its creator that a beautiful statue live in a world populated by paintings, symphonies and flower arrangements, but it serves a more important function in Condillac's argument. Just as the statue's exposure to aesthetic experience in the first part of the treatise made it into the very works of art it perceived, and thus ordered its experience in terms of coherent unities, now its movement in a world of art symbolizes a larger harmony. The statue lives in universe carefully constructed to appeal to its senses, increase its knowledge and assure its survival. The objects of this world supply precisely those impressions for which its senses are suited: rather than adaptation, the model is adequation. Condillac suggests by extension that the order we discover in the world is there because it was made for us and our senses. Thus the artistic analogies allow another mystification, by which the human mind and the natural world are rescued from the banalities of philosophical analysis to be reinstated as objects of awe and wonder. Thus the statue's impressions on wandering through the landscape reproduce a topography of the beautiful and sublime: "Ici elle est le chant des oiseaux, là le bruit d'une cascade, plus loin celui des arbres agités, un moment après le bruit du tonnerre ou d'un orage terrible."[35] The state of nature in which it lives and moves reveals itself to be an assemblage of poetic *lieux communs.*

The Spectacle of the World: Morality and Abstraction

With the reunion of the five senses, but especially with the rehabilitation of vision, the statue is initiated into the spectacle of the world. Its discovery of night is a dramatic *tour de force*:

> Elle croit le soleil perdu pour toujours. Environnée d'épaisses ténèbres, elle appréhende que tous les objets qu'il éclairait, ne se soient perdus avec lui: elle ose à peine changer de place, il lui semble que la terre va manquer sous ses pas. Mais au moment qu'elle cherche à la reconnaître au toucher,

[35] *Traité* 163. "Here it is the birds' song, there the sound of a waterfall, farther on, that of agitated trees, a moment after, the noise of thunder and a terrible storm."

> le ciel s'éclaircit, la lune répand sa lumière, une multitude d'étoiles brille dans le firmament. Frappée de ce spectacle, elle ne sait si elle en doit croire ses yeux.[36]

The revelatory experience of night is explicitly theatrical: in this passage everything—the poetic lexicon, the dramatically distended temporality, the baroque lighting effects—conspires to signify a heightened and exemplary event. This sense of spectacular climax is confirmed by the rhetorical *piano* of the following passage: "Bientôt le silence de toute la nature l'invite au repos: un calme délicieux suspend ses sens: sa paupière s'appesantit: ses idées fuient, échappent: elle s'endort."[37] The statue's experience of day and night, the natural alternation of pleasure and rest is thus supplemented by a theatrical contrast between two scenes and two moods: from sunlight and activity to a *claire de lune*, contemplation and dreams, its experience becomes increasingly nuanced and dramatic, suggestive of the full richness of human feeling.

Although the statue explores its world by trial and error, the natural order of things in the world rises up to meet it. Moved by hunger, the statue reaches out to fruits "dont les couleurs et les parfums charment ses sens" and finds them delicious and nourishing.[38] Its "experimental" discovery of the fruit is aesthetically overdetermined: the appeal of these objects to its other senses corresponds to and indicates their ability to satisfy its need. Nature is the original artist philosopher, uniting the good and the beautiful: "Tel est l'artifice de la nature pour nous faire apporter à nos besoins des remèdes dont nous sommes encore incapables de connaître les effets."[39]

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[36] *Traité* 205. "It believes the sun lost forever. Surrounded by dark shadows, it fears that all the objects illuminated by the sun have disappeared with it: the statue scarcely dares to move, it seems to it that the earth will fall beneath its footsteps. But just as the statue seeks to recognize the earth by touch, the sky clears, the moon spreads its light, a multitude of stars shine in the firmament. Stunned by this spectacle, it does not know whether it should believe its eyes."

[37] *Traité* 205. "Soon the silence of all nature invites it to rest: a delicious calm suspends its senses: its eyelids become heavy: its ideas escape, fleeing: it falls asleep."

[38] *Traité* 216. "whose colors and scents charm its senses."

[39] *Traité* 216. "Such is nature's artifice to prompt us to address our needs with remedies whose effects we are not yet capable of understanding."

The statue lives in the bosom of a benevolent nature that answers all of its needs. However, if all of the statue's needs are taken care of, it will have nothing left to desire and fall back into passivity, a state of arrested development equivalent to an "animal enseveli dans une profonde léthargie."[40] The story of the statue can only continue if there are obstacles to the satisfaction of its desires: the final test of the statue will be to provoke a crisis of passion: "le désir augmente avec l'inquiétude; il vient un moment où il agit avec tant de violence, qu'on ne trouve de remède que dans la jouissance: il se change en passion."[41] Condillac outlines a libidinal economy worthy of Sade: the statue's desire for pleasure awakens a passionate response whose violence it is powerless to resist. With increased frustration, it will wear itself out trying to gain a pleasure whose very value is increased by its unattainability: "les excès où elle tombe ont souvent pour cause une habitude contractée, et l'ombre d'un plaisir que l'imagination lui retrace sans cesse, et qui lui échappe toujours."[42] A desire frustrated by the imagination is its own punishment; the suffering it has caused for itself will make its aware that pleasures of the moment, such as the desire for a particular fruit, are not as important as its survival and the avoidance of pain. Thus even without any societal structure, moral or religious education, the statue learns through experience to moderate its desires.

Its freedom from Nature only comes about by a conscious regulation of its own desiring and needy nature. Only through observational distance does the statue come to contemplate itself, and begin to master its passions: "Elle observe ses sens, les impressions qu'ils lui transmettent; ses plaisirs, ses peines, ses besoins, les moyens de les satisfaire; et elle se fait une espèce de plan de ce qu'elle a à fuir ou à rechercher."[43] This study of the self, like the

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[40] *Traité* 223. "animal sunk in deep lethargy."

[41] *Traité* 225. "Desire increases with restlessness; a moment comes when it acts upon us with such violence, that we only find a remedy in complete satisfaction: it becomes a passion."

[42] *Traité* 229. "The excesses into which it falls are often caused by an acquired habit, and the shadow of a pleasure that the imagination retraces ceaselessly, but which will always elude it."

[43] *Traité* 231. "It observes its senses, the impressions that they transmit to it; its pleasures, its pains, its needs, the means for satisfying them; and it makes a sort of plan of what it ought to flee and to seek out."

earlier discovery of its body through touch, is based on the statue's recognition of its special status in the world, as distinct from the objects that surround its. It sees itself as a subject over and against the world of exterior objects, and takes stock of what this self is made up of: needs, desires, pleasures. In self-contemplation, it begins to see its faculties as forms of potential that can be used and controlled in certain ways.

This new orientation brings its ever closer to self-determination; it orders its studies of the world, giving it a clear sense of value and priority. Now it will not merely seek the most pleasant sensations, but will come to desire knowledge about sensations good and bad, in order to direct its future actions. Increased experience, acquired through trial and error, furnishes it with a basis for deciding future action. The recognition of need and its vicissitudes thus develops and extends its use of reason: "Elle sent que désormais il dépend d'elle de se régler d'après les connaissances qu'elle a acquises ... elle diminue l'empire des passions, pour étendre celui que la raison doit avoir sur sa volonté, et pour devenir libre."[44]

This liberty is only bought at the price of a sense of limits. Though the statue begins to sense the limits of its powers in the world, it nonetheless does not see its life as finite. Surprised by the violence of animals, it is brought by its own curiosity to become a spectator to death: "Cette vue lui peint sensiblement le passage de la vie à la mort."[45] But its very distance from what it sees, its nature as a spectacle, allows it to believe that it is not destined to end in the same way. Intent only on its own pleasures and pains, the statue watches the fate of others, while ignoring its own: "L'univers est un théâtre où elle n'est que spectateur; et elle ne prévoit pas qu'elle en doive jamais ensanglanter la scène."[46]

Moral knowledge only comes with the statue's ability to see itself from a distance, like an actor on the stage of the world, engaged in a struggle animated by desire and the passions. No longer a mere spectator, it becomes an actor in a drama: learning to sur-

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[44] *Traité* 227. "It feels that from now on it depends on itself to direct itself according to the knowledge that it has acquired.... It diminishes the rule of the passions, and increases that which reason should have over will, in order to become free."

[45] *Traité* 232. "This sight paints vividly before it the passage from life to death."

[46] *Traité* 232. "The universe is a theatre where it is but a spectator; and it does not foresee that it should ever itself bloody the stage."

vive is an experience it must "payer de son sang."[47] When nature strikes back through violence or a harsh change of seasons, it must learn to defend itself, and kill or be killed. Only through caution, ruse and ingenuity will the statue will remain animated. The entry into an economy of violence and struggle completes its moral education. From being a demonstrative artifice whose ideas, needs and desires were defined by experimental input, existing only in complete passivity and dependence, the statue has truly come to life. Its experience is no longer that of a privileged spectator in a world of art and pleasure created for it alone; the artificial needs of a hedonistic economy of luxury have been replaced by the hard reality of natural needs.

The statue's contemplation of itself and its relation to the world also gives rise to rudimentary religious beliefs. Projecting its own desires and intentions onto the world, it is convinced there is an order or design: "elle croit voir un dessein, partout où elle découvre quelque action.... Elle pense donc que ce qui lui plaît, a en vue de lui plaire; et que ce qui l'offense, a en vue de l'offenser."[48] Exteriorizing patterns of succession, causality and intention from its mind, Condillac warns, will lead it to "superstition." It begins to wish that objects serve to do it good, that they be favorable to it, and this desire becomes a sort of prayer to the sun, which it believes to be a god. Left to its own devices in this manner, the statue will continue to multiply its errors. With increasing sophistication in its ideas comes increased possibility for confusion between its mental constructions and the patterns of nature. Do its ideas come from sense experience and observation, or are they generated within and projected outside as interpretations and illusions?

Conclusion: The Statue's Soliloquy

If it is uncertain about external objects, it does not know itself any better: it knows it is composed of organs that can receive impressions from objects around it, and that its life is composed of an alternation of pleasure and pain, but what exactly is this *moi* who feels and experiences all this? Is it nothing more than an assem-

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[47] *Traité* 235. "pay by its own blood."

[48] *Traité* 241. "It believes it sees a design everywhere where there is an action ... It thus thinks that that which pleases it, intends to please it; and that which offends it, intends to offend it."

blage of organs or the succession and sum of its experiences? At the end of the treatise, Condillac has the statue look back on its development. Its soliloquy ends in suspense and wonder: "je me vois, je me touche, en un mot, je me sens, mais je ne sais ce que je suis; et, si j'ai cru être son, saveur, couleur, odeur, actuellement je ne sais plus ce que je dois me croire."[49]

The statue's tale reveals the anxiety and wonder of its birth to experience.[50] Although in retrospect its progress seems to have happened naturally, and almost by itself ("Quoi de plus simple que la manière dont j'ai appris à me servir de mes sens!"), each pleasure is balanced by a pain, and every certainty suggests new doubts.[51] At the very end, even as it has come to know so much, and acquired a new freedom and self-determination, this knowledge and sense of self confronts it with more acute questions about its existence. The final, self-reflexive phase of knowledge, where it comes to contemplate itself as an enigma, points to problems outside the realm of sense experience itself. It is as if its critical faculties and analytic habits of mind cannot resist applying themselves to the question of what it is, even as they are powerless to provide a response.

Bringing a perfect statue to life in an artful universe makes the philosopher a Pygmalion, able to artificially create an ideal human subject, whose perceptions will be trained from the start to avoid the errors that commonly affect our use of the senses and ways of reasoning. The benevolent guidance of nature, as recreated by the philosophical sculptor, operates as a *deus ex machina*, providing an order of experience in harmony with the receptive potential of its senses and mind. Godlike, the philosopher creates a whole world for the statue to live in, a natural order structured specifically to supply everything the statue needs to eventually survive on its own. In this sense, the story of the statue stages a

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[49] *Traité* 264. "I see myself, I touch myself, in a word, I feel myself, but I do not know what it is that I am; and if I believed myself to be sound, tastes, color, odor, at present I no longer know what I should believe myself to be."

[50] For a reading of Condillac's statue in terms of the "dilemma of the modern subject," see Yves Citton, "Fragile Euphorie: la statue de Condillac et les impasses de l'individu," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 323 (1994): 279–321.

[51] *Traité* 260. "What is more simple than the manner in which I learned to use my senses!"

return to Eden, where innocence takes the form of epistemological purity: the statue is a blank slate in the form of a body. The "natural" development of the statue's intellect figures not just a return to immediacy and an innocence free of metaphysical prejudice, but also a remaking of the human subject in order to bring about a reform in our ways of knowing, making future progress in the sciences possible.

However, the fiction of the animated statue that Condillac uses to perform his genetic analysis of mind takes on a life of its own: in his attempt to avoid metaphysical and materialist doctrines, Condillac ends up reintroducing both in a disguised form—the aesthetic. The sense of a grand, artful order in nature reintroduces metaphysical concern and brings philosophy to its limits. In the statue's evolution, knowledge and mastery of the world yield to an admiring contemplation of a natural order that escapes all mastery, and a reminder that we are mere transient spectators. The illuminating effect of representation—the heuristic use of fictions and artificial analogies—is thus doubled by a display of baroque effects, and a rhetoric of wonder that marks the limits of representation and understanding. From its beginning in demystifying analysis, the treatise ends by reocculting human nature and reintroducing grand metaphysical concerns.