

LITERATURE, MAPPING,
AND THE POLITICS OF
SPACE IN EARLY MODERN
BRITAIN

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER I

*Absorption and representation: mapping England in the
early modern House of Commons*

Oliver Arnold

I want to begin with a vision of the House of Commons as a living map of England. The vision belongs to an anonymous MP, who, in a remarkable speech in 1571, argued that the Commons' effectiveness as a representative institution was being undermined by the many knights and burgesses who did not reside in – and often knew little about – the shires and boroughs they had been elected to represent. 'Howe may her Majestic or howe may this court knowe', he asked his fellow MPs,

the state of her frontiers, or who shall make report of the portes, or howe every quarter, shiere, or countrey is in state? Wee who nether have seene Barwicke or St Michaells Mount can but blindly guess at them, albeit wee looke on the maps that come from thence, or letters of instructions sent from thence: some one whome observacion, experience and due consideracion of that countrey hath taught can more perfectly open what shall in question therof growe, and more effectually reason thereupon, then the skillfullest otherwise whatsoever. And that they should bee the very inhabitants of the severall counties of this kingdome who should bee here in tymes certaine employed, doubtles it was the true meaninge of the auncient kings and our forefathers who first began and established this court might be founde.¹

On this account, then, the House of Commons represents not only the people of England but the physical nation as well, and maps, our MP suggests, are wholly inadequate representations of the various places that constitute the realm precisely because they are merely imperfect signs of absent towns and terrains. Human agents, by contrast, fully embody their native boroughs and shires: 'Since we deale universally for all sortes and all places', our speaker concluded, 'there [should] bee here all sortes and all countrys'.²

This metonymical elaboration of representation – the Commons, can represent all sorts of people and all sorts of places only if all sorts of

PLATFORM OF THE LOVVER HOUSE OF THIS PRESENT PARLIAMENT.

Printed in White:— Thursday, the 27th of April, 1640.— and in the 17 Year of his Majesty's happy Reigne.

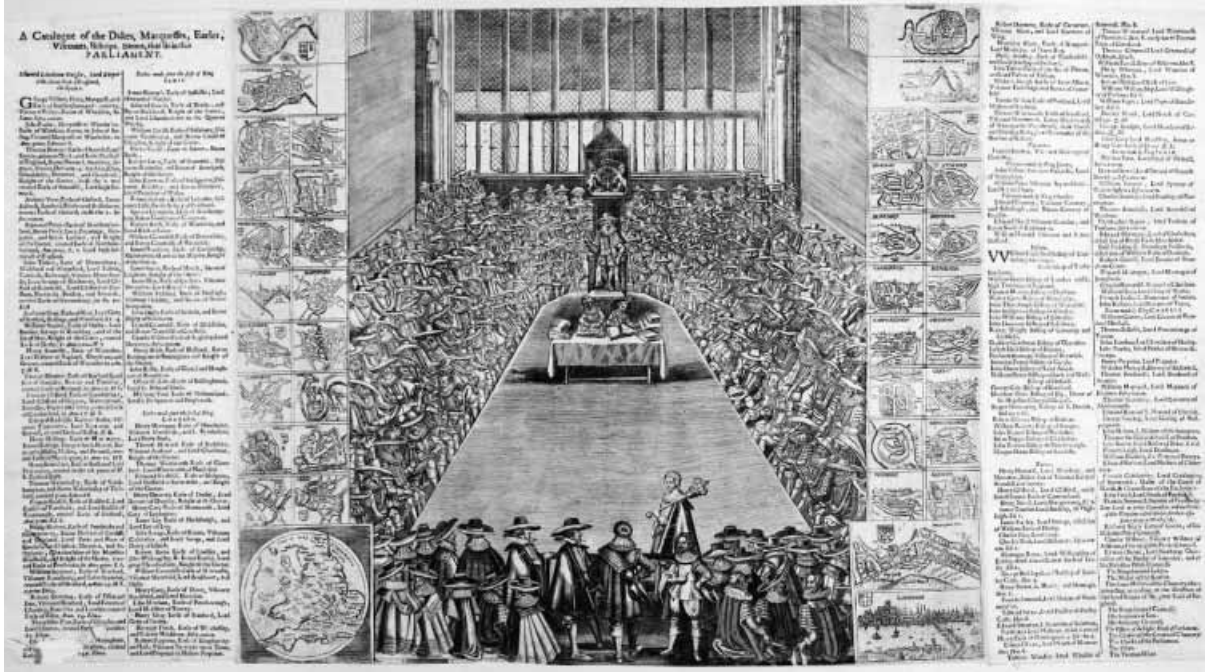


Figure 1 Engraving, *House of Commons* (1640)

people from all sorts of places serve as MPs – seems to reach a kind of pictorial fulfillment in Figure 1, an engraving of the Commons from 1640.³ On all sides, the MPs are surrounded by maps: on the right and left, bird’s-eye plans of England’s enfranchised boroughs; in the lower left corner, a map of all the shires which sent MPs to parliament; and in the lower right corner, an elaborate map and view of London. The MPs we see engaged in the business of representation make the places we see depicted on the borders present in the Commons’ Chamber. But, as we shall see, they do so – at least according to what I will claim is the dominant ideology of political representation from the Elizabethan Commons onwards – not because they collectively resided in all the towns and shires of the realm. Indeed, the literalist construction of representation lost out to a radical account of representation according to which a mere handful of men could, through the power of representation, make the entire realm and its inhabitants present in the House of Commons.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that our anonymous MP’s implicit argument for the necessity of representative bodies – because even ‘her Majestie’ is incapable of knowing her entire realm, a properly constituted Commons must supplement her deficiency – is ironically supplanted by an absolutist account of representation in which a single MP might claim, after Shakespeare’s Jack Cade, ‘my mouth shall be the parliament of England’ (2 *Henry VI*, 4.7.14–15).⁴ Indeed, as early as 1567, we find an anonymous MP making just such a boast: ‘I speke for all England, yea, and for the noble English nation’.⁵

I

The House of Commons did not have a permanent meeting place until 1549, when Edward VI granted the knights and burgesses the use of St Stephen’s Chapel in Westminster. That physical space was the positive condition for the Commons’ creation of what I will call representative space: a virtual space in which the whole realm was, according to Commons’ rhetoric, present. Our earliest description of the Commons in St Stephen’s comes to us from John Hooker’s *The Order and usage of the keeping of a Parlement in England* (1571): the Commons Chamber, according to Hooker,

is made like a Theater, having four rowes one above an other round about the same. At the higher end in the middle of the lower rowe is a seat made for the Speaker, in which he alwaies sitteth; before it is a table boord, at which sitteth

the Clark of the house and there upon [he] layeth his Books, and writeth his recordes.⁶

Hooker had, as an MP, seen the structure for himself, and Figure 2, one of the first pictorial representations of the MPs in St Stephen's, confirms his architectural analogy between the Chamber and a theatre.⁷ The engraving, moreover, seems to embrace theatricality as a strategy for representing political representation by staging St Stephen's itself: the whole of the chamber and the MPs in intense activity have been thrown open to the viewer's scrutiny. But the Commons we see is an entirely mythic place, not only because, as we shall see, it was very often nearly empty, but also because it was entirely closed to public inspection. The MPs, to be sure, figured their new home as a radically public structure – a place where all matters of public interest could be openly and freely debated and where the people themselves were 'deemed personally present'.⁸ But, in fact, the MPs used St Stephen's to secure unprecedented isolation from the public and to maintain secret proceedings. Thus, the analogies between theatre and the Commons are remarkably infelicitous: for, as the engravings ultimately – perhaps ironically – reveal, St Stephen's may be made like a theatre, but the House of Commons lacks the definitive feature of theatre: it makes no room for spectators. The elevated benches are filled entirely with performers and where the stage and parterre should be there is a void. Indeed, the closest the electorate ever got to seeing the inside of St Stephen's was as an audience to *representations* of the Commons. I want to turn now to the ways in which the early modern Commons managed to establish itself as a representative space and a public authority not by effacing the boundaries between itself and the people, but, paradoxically, by rhetorically absorbing and confining publicness within the narrow walls of St Stephen's Chapel.

Consider, for example, the Commons' peculiar definition of public speech. In 1593, Edward Coke scolded some of his fellow MPs for whispering in the House of Commons: 'Mr. Speaker, perceiving some men to whisper together, said that it was not the manner of the House that any should whisper or talk secretly, for here only publick Speeches are to be used'.⁹ Covert speech disturbs Coke because it undermines the Commons' status as a distinctly *public* institution. Private speech might, on the one hand, suggest that members were pursuing personal rather than public ends.¹⁰ On the other hand, whispering might signify an even more damaging timidity: MPs afraid to speak their minds could hardly maintain the Commons' central claim that no matter of public concern

would ever be sacrificed to restrictions on speech. According to the institutional ideology articulated in 'A Petition for the Parliament's Liberty' (1610), it was the 'ancient, generall and undoubted right of parliament to debate freely al matters, which do properly concerne the subject, and his right, or State: which freedome of debate being once forclosed, the essence of the libertie of Parliament is with all dissolved'.¹¹ In order to protect the subject, one MP argued in 1566, the Commons must be free to 'utter in this House all that is beneficiall or dangerous' to the common good.¹² If the MPs failed to maintain that liberty they would become the Adams of the nation: for just as the MPs 'doe feele the smart of [Adam and Eve's] disobedience . . . so shall all our posteritie doe unto the worlde's end'.¹³ Thus, within the logic of representational politics, Coke protects the freedoms of the English subject and his posterity by censoring the whispered speech of the MPs.

The public sphere Coke seeks to preserve, however, is strictly circumscribed by the walls of St Stephen's Chapel. For the publicness of Commons was threatened not only by members who whispered in parliament, but also, ironically, by members who reported Commons proceedings to the public. Indeed, the day after Coke admonished the whisperers, Sir Henry Knivett 'moved that for the freedom of the House it might be concluded amongst them a matter answerable at the Bar, for any man to report any thing of any Speech used, or matters done in this House'.¹⁴ Coke preserves the credibility of the House by prohibiting the concealment of speech in the chamber; Knivett wants to protect 'the freedom of the House' by concealing all speech within the chamber from the outside world – by reducing it to a whisper. Knivett's circumspection was typical: parliament men of all dispositions routinely supported the enforcement of the institution's codified prohibitions on breaching the secrecy of proceedings. Thus, the walls of St Stephen's functioned as a boundary marker of public discourse and defined a radically contained and paradoxical public sphere: within the walls, all speech was public; but nothing spoken within the walls could be reported to the public itself.

Commons' rhetoric, however, claimed that secret proceedings were necessary to protect the MPs from the oppressive scrutiny of the Lords and the Crown: only when they were 'out of the Royal sight of the King, and not amongst the great Lords so far their betters'¹⁵ could they fully protect the subject's liberties.¹⁶ The spectre of a royal audience, however, is largely a red herring; any experienced MP knew that the Lords and the monarch had relatively easy access to Commons' business.¹⁷

The MPs were far more anxious about being exposed before a public and popular audience and thus frequently punished particular members who spoke of parliament matters outside of St Stephen's.

Let me turn briefly to a case history. In 1572, the Commons forced the MP Arthur Hall to recant 'sundry lewd speeches, used as well in this House as also abroad elsewhere' in which he had both mildly defended Mary and Norfolk and insisted that the Commons should leave their fates up to Elizabeth.¹⁸ Defending Mary and disparaging the Commons' competence in the House was certainly provocative. But the internal prosecution of Hall focused on the words he spoke 'abroad elsewhere'.¹⁹ William Fleetwood's distinction between freedom of speech within and outside of St Stephen's shaped the debate on Hall's case:

[I]n all cases the tyme, place and person ought to bee considered . . . We have nowe greate matters in hande and the arraignment of a queene; and therefore he would have speech to be more liberalie suffered *within* the Howse . . . But here is mencion of speech *without* the Howse: nowe the case is changed . . . words tollerable in this Howse are not sufferable at Blunte's table.²⁰

Fleetwood isn't worried about Elizabeth learning of Hall's speech; she did and was apparently grateful for his deference to her will: Blunte's table was a tavern, not a royal council chamber. Thus, when Fleetwood recommends that 'Hall be put to aunswere sutch speach as he used out of the House',²¹ he is concerned with publicity.²² In the end, Hall participated in an elaborate show trial in which he venerated the Commons and confessed his folly.²³ But, to his cost, Hall never learned to stop talking politics at Blunte's table: in 1581, the Commons expelled him because he had 'published the conferences of the Howse in print' in two irreverent pamphlets.²⁴ The Commons made every effort to destroy all copies of the two pamphlets.²⁵

Why exactly was discussing parliamentary affairs at Blunte's table taboo? Or, to put the question more sharply, why were 'private' citizens – the very political subjects who supposedly empowered the Commons – alone denied routine access to information about Commons' business, which members typically shared not only with the nobility, but also with their own professional and social peers (lawyers, judges, important merchants and so on)?²⁶ The MPs wished, I suggest, to usurp all public debate and to control exclusively the power of acting in the name of public opinion. This desire to monopolise publicness is richly, ironically at play in Robert Cecil's outrage over leaks during the 1601 debates about the Queen's right to grant commercial and manufacturing monopolies to her favourites:

I fear we are not secret within ourselves . . . [and] whatsoever is subject to public expectation cannot be good, while the parliament matters are ordinary talk in the street. I have heard myself, being in my coach, these words spoken aloud: ‘God prosper those that further the overthrow of these monopolies! God send the prerogative touch not our liberty!’ . . . I think these persons would be glad that all sovereignty were converted into popularity.²⁷

But making sovereignty a function of popularity is, of course, exactly what the ideology of Commons promises to do; the members, after all, claimed to derive their authority from popular elections. For Cecil, shut up in his private coach, Commons ceases to function properly precisely when it threatens to fulfill its own ideology.²⁸ Cecil, to be sure, is a conservative and a paid counsellor to the Queen, but his desire that the MPs remain ‘secret within [themselves]’ was shared by all but a few radicals.

To remain ‘secret within [themselves]’, the Commons not only had to prevent particular MPs from leaking information to the public but also had to prevent the public from witnessing for themselves the proceedings of Commons. Thus, John Hooker stipulates that the Sergeant at Arms must ‘not suffer any to enter into this house during the time of sitting here, unlesse he be one of the house’. But ‘if any forain person doo enter into that house, the assembly therof beeing sitting . . . he ought . . . to be punished’.²⁹ Despite many such prohibitions, however, dozens of ‘strangers to the House’ – to use a favourite phrase of the MPs – managed to make their way past the Sergeant at Arms during the Elizabethan and Jacobean parliaments.³⁰ Strangers to the house were almost always imprisoned in the Gatehouse – which the MP William Lambarde described as ‘a prison to th[e] House’.³¹

The practices of figuring members of the public as ‘strangers’ and ‘forain person[s]’ and barring them from St Stephen’s seem extraordinarily inappropriate for an institution that claimed to be empowered by the people. But, in fact, the Commons instituted its secrecy rules and exclusionary procedures during precisely the same period when many members began routinely to argue that Commons was a sovereign authority because it was a public institution and a representative body.³² According to Coke, the Commons could more than hold their own with the Lords and the Crown because ‘his Majesty and the Nobles being every one a great person, represented but themselves; but . . . [the] Commons though they were but inferior men, yet every one of them represented a thousand of men’.³³ An MP in 1593 similarly claimed that ‘there is no knight of any shire here but representeth many thousands’.³⁴

The MPs boasted, moreover, that the Commons' representative operations actually made all the subjects of the realm 'representatively present in us of this house of Commons'.³⁵

II

Making the people 'representatively present' in the House of Commons was the distinctive myth of Commons' ideology throughout the Tudor-Stuart period. As early as 1565, Sir Thomas Smith had claimed that, the parliament of England . . . representeth and hath the power of the whole realme . . . For everie Englishman is entended to bee there present, either in person or by procuration and attornies . . . from the Prince . . . to the lowest person of England.³⁶

By the time James I ascended, it was typical for the Commons to claim that 'the whole body of the realm, and every particular member thereof, either in person or by representation (upon their own free elections), are by the laws of the realm deemed personally present' in St Stephen's Chapel.³⁷

Why, then, bar the people from an institution in which they are already present? Because the fiction of the people's presence – the fiction that empowered the Commons – could be maintained only by excluding the people. For illicit eyewitnesses discovered that the MPs, far from magically filling St Stephen's with a plenitude of presence, frequently left the chamber almost empty. In 1584, Speaker Puckering created a commotion when he revealed to the MPs that John Bland, a London currier, had publicly reported,

that this house passing the Bill of the Shoemakers had proceeded contrary to an Order taken in the same House, which he [Bland] said was, that the Shoemakers Bill should not be further read till the Curriers Bill were first read before; and hath likewise reported, that the Curriers could have no Justice in this House; and also that this House passed the Shoemakers Bill when there were scanty fifty persons in the House . . . And further reported, that the Bill for the Tanners lately read in this House was not all read out, but some leaves thereof left unread . . . Which Speeches being very slanderous and prejudicial to the State of this House . . . it was thereupon resolved, that Bland . . . be examined.³⁸

Reporting minor deviations from parliamentary practice – considering bills out of order, reading only portions of a bill – hardly undermined the fundamental integrity of Commons; but publicising the fact that only 50 out of some 450 members were sitting during a session did. The absence of members rendered St Stephen's doubly empty: empty of the

representatives themselves, and, consequently, empty of the millions of people those representatives, according to the most important institutional myth of the Commons, made present at the centre of governance. But Bland's report slandered Commons, above all, because it demonstrated not only that the people were neither personally nor representatively present in St Stephen's but also that Commons continued to act despite their absence.

Absenteeism in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Commons was remarkably high: 'attendance', according to J. E. Neale, 'was a constant problem'.³⁹ The work of Neale, David Dean and Jennifer Loach indicates that throughout the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I the House was frequently only half full and that it was not at all unusual for only one quarter of the members to be present during business.⁴⁰ On quite a few occasions, St Stephen's was almost empty: one recorded vote in 1610 lists fifteen ayes and fifteen nays;⁴¹ on 1 July 1607, Robert Bowyer's diary entry strongly remarks that a bill was read with only twenty MPs sitting.⁴² On those days over 400 MPs were absent. (We can now justly call the engravings of the Commons – with the members crowding a packed St Stephen's – propaganda.)

In theory, absenteeism was discouraged and could be punished. William Lambarde's tract on parliament warns that 'no Knight or Burgess should depart without license of the House or of the Speaker, to be entered with the Clerk upon pain to lose their wages'.⁴³ An anonymous author's 1606 manuscript notes on parliamentary procedure make special mention of the many official rules against absenteeism.⁴⁴ There were, moreover, sporadic practical measures to curb absenteeism. To encourage attendance, the House could institute roll calls.⁴⁵ Thus, during the 1580 session, 'it was Ordered that the House should be called on *Wednesday* next . . . that so it might appear who did diligently intend the business of the House, and who did negligently absent themselves'.⁴⁶ And in 1581 at end of Session fines were levied against members who had been absent for the whole session.⁴⁷

These measures, however, produced absolutely no improvement. More important, with few exceptions the MPs never expressed any real concern over the effect absenteeism might have on the day-to-day operations and efficacy of Commons. By contrast, leading members of the House were acutely aware of the threat *the public discovery of absenteeism* posed to the mythology of the Commons. During the especially severe attendance problems of 1606, Sir Thomas Holcroft argued against a proposal to send county and borough officials letters recalling the many

absent members. While Holcroft agreed that the missing members must somehow be contacted, he nonetheless ‘misliked the Course, for he wished no Writing to be’.⁴⁸ Holcroft argued that recording the Commons’ emptiness in letters risked damaging publicity: ‘it will be a Scandal, to shew, what we have done [during the session] is done with so small a Number’.⁴⁹ Holcroft recognised that absenteeism was scandalous not because it revealed a dysfunctional Commons but because it demonstrated, on the contrary, that the Commons could meet, debate and act when the people were neither physically nor representatively present.⁵⁰

But by 1606 some MPs recognised that Commons’ own mythology of representation made the issue of absenteeism virtually irrelevant. Robert Bowyer, for example, claimed that it was entirely unnecessary to recall the absent members:

[I] could wish the Company full in regard of the business which is expected, yet will I not soe narrowly impound the . . . Sufficiency of those that remaine, as to think them unable to proceed in such matters as they shall have in hand, and for that which remaineth, it will suffice that all that are absent, Yea all the realme is intended present.⁵¹

The Commons, whether full or nearly empty, constituted ‘all the realme’. Thus, Bowyer suggested, it makes no sense to argue that the Commons requires the presence of all its members, for if some members are *physically outside* of St Stephen’s, they, like everyone else in England, are *representatively inside* St Stephen’s.⁵²

Bowyer, then, doesn’t diminish the importance of representativeness; on the contrary, he conceives the Commons’ powers of representation in almost mystical terms. Bowyer’s elaboration of the Commons’ ‘sufficiency’ has a Derridean quality: those who are absent, Bowyer claims, are present in virtue of their absence.⁵³ Indeed, absence, as a category, is evacuated in Bowyer’s rhetoric. The Commons is no longer a metonymy for a greater but absent whole because it is the whole. Richard Hooker similarly claimed that the parliament, through the representative operations of the Commons, became not a reflection of the body of the realm but instead its incarnation:

The *Parliament of England* . . . is that whereupon the very *ESSENCE* of all government within this kingdom doth depend. It is even the body of the whole Realme; it consisteth of the *King* and of all that within the *Land* are subject unto him; for they all are there present, either in person or by such as they voluntarily have derived from their personal right unto.⁵⁴

James I, frustrated by similar claims for the miraculous power of

representation, once reminded his Commons that they did ‘not so represent the whole commons of the realm as the shadow doth the body but only representatively’.⁵⁵ But James finally underestimates the rhetoric of Bowyer, Hooker, and many others; according to these MPs and theorists, the people are the shadows of a body that takes their place.

The construction of representation as absorption critically shaped the Commons’ relationship to the public. For example, the myth of representative presence allowed the MPs to transform their accountability to the realm and people beyond St Stephen’s into an internal accountability. Thus, during the enclosure debates of 1597, the MPs acknowledged the desires of the various groups interested in land management even as they effectively effaced those interest groups by imaginatively relocating them inside St Stephen’s. On 26 November, an anonymous speaker, noting that ‘the ears of our great sheepmasters do hang at the doors of this House’,⁵⁶ acknowledged that the MPs could serve their own private interests by gratifying those rich constituents. But he argued that the Commons should nonetheless preserve for small farmers the land those wealthy husbandmen coveted for grazing:

A lawe framed out of the private affections of men wil never tend to the generall good of all; and if every one may putt in a caution to save his owne particuler it will never prove a lawe of restraint, but rather of loosenes and libertie. The eyes of the poore are upon this parliament, and sad for the want they yet suffer. The cries of the poore doe importune much, standing like reedes shaking in every corner of the realme. This place is an epitome of the whole realme: the trust of the poore committed to us, whose persons we supplie, doth challenge our furtheraunce of their releife. This hath bene the inscription on mayne bills. If our forwardnes procede from single-hartedness we can noe waye effect this so well as by leadinge their handes to the plough and leaving the success to God. We sitt now in judgment over ourselves.⁵⁷

The speech is quite beautiful and astonishingly modern; it is also, I think, heartfelt. And yet it is precisely as he articulates a representation of selflessness that our MP reveals what is deeply disturbing about political representation. Because he and his fellow MPs supply the persons – an extraordinary phrase – of the people of the realm, they assume an enormous accountability, but an accountability they can feel only to themselves. We see this in the odd self-reflexiveness of the speaker’s final admonition – ‘We sitt now in judgment over ourselves’ – which should, one feels, recall the poor: the eyes of the poor are upon us and they sit in judgement over us. This displacement of the poor by a representative ‘we’ fulfils the mimetic figure of Commons as ‘an epitome of the whole realm’. If the Commons rather than metonymically repre-

senting the realm simply is the whole realm in miniature, there is nothing outside it which is not also in it. Thus, even as the speaker articulates the Commons' moral and political accountability to the public, that public is relocated within the Commons itself. What remains, after political representation, is an 'abroad elsewhere' – an insubstantial, otherworldly place inhabited by the ghostly people, the shadows of the body.

The construction of the Commons' representative operations I've been recovering here establishes the House of Commons not merely as a representative body but as a representation. That is, the Commons, on this account, is not merely a collection of representative agents who speak for the absent people they represent; rather, the House of Commons is itself a representation of the realm: 'This *place*', our anonymous MP claims, 'is an epitome of the whole realme'. If the Commons is a representation of the realm, the engravings of the Commons can be understood as representations of representation (though we must bear in mind here the incarnational mode of representation that characterises so much parliamentary discourse), and I want to conclude this essay by suggesting that we can understand what kind of a 'place' the House of Commons is by revisiting the engravings of the MPs in St Stephen's.

But consider first Figure 3, a licensed broadside of the House of Lords. This representation is truly theatrical in the great art historian and theorist Michael Fried's sense of the word: here, the great display themselves, turn themselves toward the viewer; here, all eyes seem to solicit and return our gaze.⁵⁸ The engravings of the Commons, by contrast, depict MPs whose absorption in their own activity renders them oblivious to our presence. Their gazes are directed in every direction but ours. These representations of the House of Commons thus refuse to acknowledge the presence of any potential viewer; the viewer, I suggest, is thus absorbed by their absorption.

Let me elaborate this distinction between theatricality and absorption by suggesting that the difference in the way the two houses choose to represent themselves derives from their divergent institutional ideologies. The Lords' power is inherent in their persons not in their representative status – recall the MPs' claim that while knights and burgesses represented thousands, the Lords represented 'but themselves'. Thus, the engraving of the Lords depicts the power and authority of the institution simply by putting the Peers on spectacular display.

By contrast, the Commons' authority, according to its ideology,

rested on its capacity to make all England present within its walls. Thus, we see in the engravings the MPs busy at the business of representing us. The MPs, that is, are absorbed in the activity of absorption. Thus, the representational strategy of the engravings – that is, absorption – repeats the representational strategy of the House of Commons: that is, absorption. The reason, in short, that the MPs do not return the viewer's gaze is that there simply is – according to the Commons' rhetoric – no viewer to gaze.

NOTES

1. T. E. Hartley (ed.), *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I, Vol. I: 1558–1581* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1981), p. 227.
2. *Ibid.*
3. This engraving is in the collection of the Print Room at the British Library and is reproduced here with the permission of the British Museum. I am grateful to the Print Room staff for all their valuable assistance and to Princeton University for the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant which made my visit to the collection possible.
4. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
5. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 137.
6. John Hooker, *The Order and usage of the keeping of a Parlement in England* (1571). Rpt. in John Snow, *Parliament in Elizabethan England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 163.
7. Figure 2 is in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries, London, as is Figure 3.
8. *Statutes of the Realm*, 12 vols., ed. A. Luders *et al.* (London: Record Commission, 1810–28), vol. II, p. 1018.
9. Simonds d'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, both of the House of Lords and House of Commons* (London: John Starkey, 1682), p. 487.
10. Although private bills were often used to accomplish what we would consider public works (road repair, dam modifications, and so on), some private bills pursued strictly personal ends. To take one example among hundreds: on 27 May 1572, Frances Alford, the important London MP, introduced a bill to settle a disputed real estate deal in his favour (Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, pp. 291–3). For the role of private bills in Commons, see D. M. Dean, 'Public or Private? London, Leather and Legislation in Elizabethan England', *Historical Journal* 31 (1988), 543, 545. J. D. Alsop has suggested that the entirely routine granting of subsidies during the Elizabethan parliaments – there is no evidence, he claims, that any Elizabethan MP 'ever attempted to refuse a request for taxation' – enabled the MPs to devote much of their time to using the lower house as 'a

forum where private interests could achieve realization of their own priorities' ('Parliament and Taxation', D. M. Dean and N. L. Jones (eds.), *The Parliaments of Elizabethan England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 100).

11. I quote here from a very early printed copy of the 'Petition', included by an anonymous editor in *A Record of some worthy Proceedings; in the Honourable, wise and faithfull Howse of Commons in the late Parliament* (Amsterdam [?]: G. Thorp [?], 1611), p. 16. The MPs composed the document after James I publicly declared that he could establish impositions by prerogative and then sought to restrain debate on the matter. See Elizabeth Read Foster, *Proceedings in Parliament, 1610*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), vol. II, p. 371.
12. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 136.
13. *Ibid.*
14. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, p. 487.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 515.
16. This is perhaps a good place to acknowledge that I frequently refer here to the ideology or the rhetoric of the House of Commons; there were, of course, many ideologies and rhetorics in play in the Commons. The Commons was not a homogeneous institution. Rather, the members of Commons pursued diverse agendas, had diverse interests and loyalties, and, to be sure, had very different ideas about their own institution's role in contemporary political culture. At one extreme, we have the Wentworths and Robert Snagge; at the other, members of Commons who were also paid officers of the Crown. I have tried here to focus on ideas, practices and ideologies that were endorsed by the vast majority of Elizabethan and Jacobean MPs.
17. Both Whigs and Revisionists give far too much credence to MPs' protests over the Crown's access to their proceedings: for Whigs such protests count as fiery opposition; for Revisionists, they demonstrate Commons' fear of and subservience to the Crown.
18. This was Hall's maiden speech and it gives ample evidence of the rashness that so frequently made him the subject of the Commons' wrath. For a summary of Hall's career, see *The House of Commons: 1558-1603, Vol. II (Members, D-L)*, ed. P. W. Hasler (London: HM Stationery Office, 1981).
19. The Commons, to be sure, also censored members solely for speech within St Stephen's. Such restrictions on speech were sometimes motivated by the Commons' fear of offending the monarch, but a fine article by J. P. Sommerville suggests that the Commons' censoring of its own members did not decline as the body asserted greater independence from the Crown. Thus, while the MPs sent Sir Christopher Piggot to the Tower after he spoke in 1607 against James' cherished Union plans, the MPs of 1624 voted to strike from the record Sergeant Higham's defense of James' impositions (see 'Parliament, Privilege, and the Liberties of the Subject', J. H. Hexter (ed.), *Parliament and Liberty from the Reign of Elizabeth to the English Civil War*

- (Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 75).
20. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 360.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
 22. Compare the position of the MP William Fennor, whose 'infinite . . . estimation of liberties' (Hartley, *Proceedings*, p. 361) and desire for 'libertie of speech without restraint' (p. 355) moved him to urge that Hall not be punished at all but instead 'held as a mad man' (p. 361).
 23. See Hartley, *Proceedings*, pp. 330 and 366 for two different accounts of Hall's performance.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 509.
 25. After being dismembered, Hall was imprisoned in the Tower until he produced a suitable recantation. After nearly a year, Hall finally won his release by proclaiming his 'reverence' for all those aspects of Commons mythology that he had debunked (see H. G. Wright, *The Life and Works of Arthur Hall of Grantham* (Manchester University Press, 1919), p. 191). Thus, for example, he acknowledged the antiquity of Commons he had so carefully disproved in his pamphlets (see Arthur Hall, *A letter sent by F.A. touchyng a quarell betweene A. Hall, and M. Mallerie. With an admonition to him [Hall] being a burgesse of the parliament, for his better behaiour therein* (London: H. Bynneman, 1576), sig. D4).
 26. Notestein and Relf's careful discussion of publicity in and before 1629 makes it quite clear that before 1610, and really before 1621, the circulation of manuscripts of Commons speeches and proceedings was very limited. Moreover, these reports were always made to men of a quite select class: 'Members of Parliament, important country families, great nobles, politically affected clergymen, ambassadors from foreign states, Privy Councilers and less important people.' Footnotes supply examples for all the types mentioned in this list except, revealingly, 'less important people'.
 27. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 653.
 28. Cecil was similarly distressed by the appearance outside of Parliament of 'a multitude of people who said they were commonwealth men and desired [the House] to take compassion of their griefs' – a multitude who, in other words, asked the Commons to do precisely what the Commons habitually claimed to do (see Penry Williams, 'The Crown and the Counties', Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 135). Williams suggests that Cecil's famous outburst 'reflects . . . some remarkable views on the proper relationship between Parliament and the people' (p. 136). But, as I am trying to suggest here, most MPs seem to support Cecil's views, at least on this count. When the quite progressive Robert Snagge, for example, moved in 1571 that the people be consulted about the Commons' debates over the fate of the Duke of Norfolk, even his usual cohorts failed to second him (Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 392). Of course, when it served their purposes, the MPs did treat the electorate as a primitive constituency. During the debate over impositions in 1610, for example, many members, sensing that the financial

- burden would be unpopular, suggested that the knights and burgesses return to 'their several countries' to 'take intelligence' (Foster, *Proceedings in Parliament*, Vol. II, p. 292). To this end, Sir William Twysden prepared an argument based on precedent to prove that the MPs could 'go into the country and receive a resolution from them [the voters]'²⁹ (Foster, *Proceedings*, p. 366). Cf. *Commons Journals*, p. 427.
29. Hooker, *The Order and usage*, pp. 173, 170.
30. See, for example, the cases of Edmund Moore and John Turner (D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 394); 'two younge gentlemen' (Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 200); and William Hanney (D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 288–9).
31. William Lambarde, *Notes on the procedures and privileges of the House of Commons* [1584], ed. Paul L. Ward (London: HM Stationery Office, 1977), p. 76. For the use of the Gatehouse as a holding pen for 'strangers to the House', see the cases of Charles Johnson (D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 248), Charles Morgan (p. 334), Richard Robinson (p. 334), and Roger Dodswell (p. 565).
32. Prior to 1571, for example, the Commons had never claimed a right to secret debate (Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History, 1509–1660* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 222). And while Hooker's 1571 tract harps on barring strangers from St Stephen's, the *Modus tenendi Parliamentum* itself makes no mention of excluding the public.
33. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 515. Coke's interpretation of the three estates very much reflects the Commons' account of English governance. That is, Coke assumes not only that parliament is comprised of the three estates but also that the monarch cannot claim to represent anyone but himself. The monarchy, when it admitted of the sovereignty of the king-in-parliament, had its own strategy for figuring the king as the representative of the whole realm. Coke's account of parliament closely echoes, among others, Lambarde, John Hooker and Aylmer. Hooker, for example, argues that while the King is 'a ful whole degree of him self' (*The Order and usage*, p. 152), by calling Commons he can 'seek & aske the advice, council and assistance of his whole Realme' (p. 145). In representational ideology, being a whole degree unto oneself is a deficiency. The Lords were also keenly aware of this rhetoric: they strenuously objected when Snagge allegedly claimed that 'the noble men represented their own voices only' and were thus 'unable to deale in matters of common weale' (Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 403). The Lords' alarm over Snagge's speech would seem to indicate the increasing political capital attached to representativeness.
34. Jennifer Loach, *Parliament Under the Tudors* (Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 148. Because each MP represented many people, he was a public rather than private person. Thus, Carleton argued that a particular MP who had been detained from the House, must be brought to St Stephen's: 'forasmuch as hee nowe was not a private man but to supply the roome, person

- and place of a multitude especially chosen and therfor sent . . . for the liberty of the House' (Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 238).
35. *The Commons' Apology* [1604], quoted in J.R. Tanner (ed.), *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I: 1603–1625* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 219.
 36. *De Republica Anglorum* [1583], ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 78–9.
 37. *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. II, p. 1018.
 38. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 366.
 39. J. E. Neale, *The Elizabethan House of Commons* [1949] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 413.
 40. See *ibid.*, p. 414; G. R. Elton, 'Parliament', Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 88–9; Loach, *Parliament Under the Tudors*, pp. 40–1.
 41. Foster, *Proceedings in Parliament*, vol. II, p. 277.
 42. *The Parliamentary Diary of Robert Bowyer, 1606–1607*, ed. David Harris Wilson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), p. 363.
 43. Lambarde, *Notes on the procedures*, p. 66.
 44. See 'Observations rules and orders collected out of diverse Journalls of the house of Commons,' British Library Egerton MS 3365, fol. 51v.
 45. 'It is common policy to say upon the Wednesday that the House shall be called on Saturday, and upon Saturday to say it shall be called on Wednesday; and so from day to day by fear thereof to keep the company together' (Lambarde, *Notes on the procedures*, p. 90).
 46. D'Ewes, *The Journals of all the Parliaments*, p. 283.
 47. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 546.
 48. *Parliamentary Diary of Robert Bowyer*, pp. 96–7.
 49. *Commons Journals*, vol. I, p. 291. In 1610, an anonymous MP was similarly outraged that only 100 MPs were present but 'moved that it might nowhere be recorded that there was so great a neglect'.
 50. See *Parliamentary Diary of Robert Bowyer*, p. 97. Bills were frequently enacted when only a small percentage of the House was sitting. According to Loach, during the parliament of 1601 there was not a single division – i.e., a counted vote – in which more than half the members participated (*Parliament Under the Tudors*, pp. 40–1). This figure is all the more striking because divisions were conducted only when important and potentially controversial legislation was at issue.
 51. *Parliamentary Diary of Robert Bowyer*, p. 97.
 52. *Ibid.* Bowyer's account of the Commons' representativeness is quasi-mystical in part because the vehicle of representation is not a collection of agents but instead a mythic institution. Gadamer argues that similarly deconstructionist notions of representation begin to emerge when 'in light of the Christian idea of the incarnation and the mystical body [representation] acquired a completely new meaning. Representation now no longer means "copy" or "representation in a picture" . . . but "replacement" . . . what is

- represented is present in the copy' (*Truth and Method* [1960], trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp. 513n14, 53). MPs and parliamentary theorists, moreover, directly and indirectly borrowed their figurations of the body politic from the theological discourses.
53. Bowyer's elaboration of representation, precisely because of this deconstructionist turn, suggests some of the problems that might attend a deconstructionist critique of political representation.
 54. Hooker, *The Order and usage*, p. 192.
 55. Quoted in J. P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution, 1603–1688* (Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 21.
 56. Hartley, *Proceedings in the Parliaments of Elizabeth I*, p. 222.
 57. *Ibid.*, pp. 220–1.
 58. See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 1–70.