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Politics Between and Within Us: Authenticity and Theatricality in Modern Political Thought

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**POLITICS BETWEEN AND WITHIN US: AUTHENTICITY AND THEATRICALITY
IN MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

by

DANIEL J. MCCOOL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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Abstract

POLITICS BETWEEN AND WITHIN US: AUTHENTICITY AND THEATRICALITY IN MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

by

DANIEL J. MCCOOL

Adviser: Professor Thomas Halper

This dissertation details the ways in which two distinct models of politics — the politics of authenticity and the politics of theatricality — have influenced political rhetoric and activity in America and beyond. The focus on authenticity in politics goes back to the ancients, yet it has taken on greater political significance in the modern era. Morally-charged language of “telling the truth”, or “being oneself” in politics has meant that public judgment and analysis has increasingly focused on the interiority of the speaker: one’s intentions, feelings and consistency, rather than on the persuasive case one is attempting to communicate. In the extreme, this has led to some nefarious actions and political regimes in the modern world (e.g. the Terror of the French Revolution and twentieth century totalitarianism) as well as less severe but still troubling results (the lack of a dynamic public sphere in which our everyday political discourse takes place). To combat the theory that led to these developments, I offer an analysis of theatrical politics which sees politics as something existing “outside and between us” rather than “within us.” At the same time, I acknowledge the ways in which authenticity in politics has led to emancipa-

tory movements of oppressed persons and groups (e.g. abolitionism and civil rights, especially in America). The main representative of authentic politics I employ in this dissertation is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and for theatricality, I detail the arguments of Hannah Arendt. I argue that we can find a proper balance between the two models in the politics of Henry David Thoreau. Ultimately, I explain the potential for a politics in which the best elements of each model could be practiced.

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CHAPTER One: Introduction

The ideal of authenticity is one of the most common and powerful standards by which modern public actors are judged. At no time and in no place is this stronger today than in American society. As a culture that values authenticity, we attempt to tear off public masks and costumes in order to reveal the intentions and the characters of the individuals underneath. Public actors, in both government and everyday society, are expected to act outwardly in line with what they “really” feel, think, or intend or else they are deemed illegitimate. Politicians must convey transparency, intimacy and unity in their characters. There are many examples of this. George W Bush’s acceptance speech at the 2004 Republican National Convention echoed a theme that was repeated by campaign operatives in order to contrast him with the “flip-flopping” John Kerry to great effect. “In the last four years,” Bush confided, as if talking to a friend, “you and I have come to know each other. Even when we don’t agree, at least you know what I believe and where I stand.”¹ The strategy behind the 2012 presidential campaign of Barack Obama relied on this same standard, as White House senior advisor David Plouffe accused Mitt Romney on Meet the Press of having “no core.”² This constant charge of inauthenticity by the Obama campaign prompted several feckless defenses of Romney’s character, including one by a member of his gubernatorial administration in Massachusetts: “I could tell immediately, just by our interaction, that he is the real thing — authentic! He struck me then — and now — as honest, transparent

¹ George W. Bush, "President Bush's Acceptance Speech to the Republican National Convention." Washington Post. September 02, 2004.

² Tom Cohen, "Romney Remains the Top Target of GOP Rivals, White House" CNN. October 30, 2011.

and inclusive.”³ While this attempt by the Romney campaign and its surrogates proved futile, the effort alone shows how important it is for politicians to seem authentic.

The ideal of authenticity is not one relegated to electoral politics. In non-political matters of public life, especially in celebrity culture, we have been trained to peer behind the words of public actors, into their minds, their souls, their very selves to determine their level of sincerity. Perhaps the most common example of this is the public apology, which seems to be a frequent ritual in our culture of authenticity. The public apology generally proceeds in a three-step process: a public figure or celebrity transgresses a social norm, the public figure or celebrity apologizes publicly, and finally, “the public” response is to judge whether the public act of the apology is real or fake and hence, legitimate or illegitimate. From marital infidelity to controversial remarks to cheating in sports, the public demands spiritual atonement from transgressors. Even the field of psychology has, in recent years, lauded the healthful benefits of apologizing. In an article in *Psychology Today*, psychologist Ugo Uche argues that it is important to teach children how to apologize for bad behavior:

While a public apology may seem trivial, it has a powerful effect on the person making the apology, and it internally puts the apologizer at odds with his or her beliefs. The human brain is designed to be congruent, and when people engage in behavior that contradicts their values, they experience inner turmoil until they have come to terms with the behavior.⁴

³ Jane Edmonds, "Jane Edmonds at the 2012 Republican National Convention." C-SPAN Video Library. August 23, 2012.

⁴ Ugo Uche, "Why Apologies Are Important." *Psychology Today*. November 18, 2009.

Like the original theories that created the politics of authenticity, the individual must become whole again after transgressing, bringing harmony within the mind and between the mind and the behavior. As Rousseau will argue, the authentic self needs to become “truly one.”⁵

Through a number of examples in everyday life, we can understand that when public figures are judged by their authenticity and sincerity, their legitimacy is measured not primarily by what they say or do, but by whether or not they believe in what they say or do. The modern mass public displaces judgment away from outward acts and onto the individual’s character, intention, sincerity, and importantly, whether such feelings are prideful and self-serving (and thus illegitimate) or humble self-sacrificing (and thus legitimate). This is not to say that this is an exclusively modern phenomenon. Indeed, some of the most celebrated figures in Western history have been praised on such grounds. Socrates, the seminal figure in the history of Western political thought, stands in front of the jury in the *Apology*, without attempting to manipulate their judgment with the presence of his weeping family, and professes that the sincerity of his words are a testament to his commitment to virtues of justice and truth larger than himself.⁶ We see this kind of authentic self-sacrifice play out in the story of Christ and other martyrs from Western history. What is new in modern society is the source from which the virtue of authenticity is seen to emerge and the polity it is supposed to help create. In the ancient and medieval worlds, the self was compelled to be privately authentic and publicly sincere by cosmic forces that governed a

⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 40.

⁶ Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1997).

⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 321.

well-ordered universe.⁷ In modernity, the self is supposed to be compelled from within to tell the truth and remain steadfast in one's beliefs no matter the consequences.

Aloneness, Authenticity, Democracy

The moral standard of authenticity that we apply to public figures, in which the inner self matches the presentation of the outer self, is a relatively new one in world history. In his book *Sincerity*, Jay Magill gives a thumbnail view of how the virtues of authenticity and sincerity have woven their ways throughout our modern culture:

Over the decades, this ethos of sincerity evolved from seeking the truth of oneself to sharing the whole of that truth with others with unabashed pride, a trait that would come to be called, in modern times, authenticity. This insistence on being who one feels oneself to be at all times eventually found a home in modern art and literature. Artists and writers well into the twentieth century, following Rousseau, declared the importance of the self's authenticity against the inauthenticity of modern consumer society, which many critics believed had enslaved individuals in a capitalist system and then offered them an illusory freedom through the purchase of its products. The line of criticism and rebellious self-expressiveness has rolled into our own time, of course, through art, music, fashion, and literature – through Beats and hippies and punk and rap – and eventually through the messages of some of the world's largest advertising agencies and corporations...⁸

Why did this ideal become so important in the modern world? Many have answered that it stems from the modern phenomenon of aloneness, starting in the modern period. With the break-down of the family, the onslaught of capitalism, the promise of the emancipation of the self from social bonds, and the radical centering of religious life on the self, individuals found themselves cut off

⁸ Magill, R. Jay, *Sincerity: How a Moral Ideal Born Five Hundred Years Ago Inspired Religious Wars, Modern Art, Hipster Chic, and the Curious Notion That We All Have Something to Say (no Matter How Dull)* (New York: Norton, 2012), 21.

from ties to external persons and institutions that had given earlier peoples their identities. This type of aloneness created an absence of politics. As Charles Taylor describes it, the combination of these forces created “a society of self-fulfillers, whose affiliations are more and more seen as revocable” which “cannot sustain the strong identification with the political community which public freedom needs.”⁹ Modern thinkers had to come up with new theories of politics and community that took as a given the atomization of the self.

Aloneness has been the problem with which we each grapple while authenticity has been the state of being to which we each aspire. While in some ways we wish to be left alone to develop our unique lives and personalities from within, we also seek community in which that uniqueness can be displayed. This combination of an authentic self with an intimate community is a quintessentially modern one which continues today. At the height of “the 60s” in America, political theorist Marshall Berman wrote about “both the dignity and agony of aloneness” in connecting the personal trait of authenticity with the political system of democracy:

The way to democracy that the Enlightenment developed, and that millions of people in the 1960s experienced anew, was a distinctively *modern* way. It meant people coming together from a matrix of solitude, people breaking out of an existential loneliness. This loneliness was completely missing from the culture of ancient democracy. But it is a central modern experience... Two millennia of Christian domination have not only legitimized aloneness, they have sanctified it and given it an aura; this aura touches everyone, Christian or not. One of the Enlightenment’s main tasks was to establish a secular foundation for a *right to privacy*. The eighteenth century, like the twentieth, produced generations deeply and often happily immersed in private life that demanded new, democratic forms of public life. From Rousseau, above all, we can learn both the dignity and agony of aloneness, and the yearning for a new form of community. What kind of community should it be? A community that instead of absorbing and crushing the self will recognize and affirm it; a community where everybody will be open about their identity and welcome — eagerly, even — the opportunity to confess who and

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 508.

what they are; where every individual can ‘expand his being and multiply his happiness by sharing them with his fellow men.’ Some thinkers argue that these values are contradictory and incompatible. ‘The politics of authenticity’ makes the impossible demand to realize them all at once.¹⁰

Berman, by employing his prized example of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, makes links between being, or achieving, one’s self and a democracy in which that self is able to be expressive. Elsewhere, in *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Berman employs the early modern tragedy of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to make connections between authenticity, humanity, community, and ultimately democracy. After Lear is stripped of political power (and significantly, the royal vestments that go along with it) and thrown out into the street to face “the naked truth [of] what man is forced to face when he has lost everything,” he

recognizes a connection between himself and another human being. This recognition enables him to grow in sensitivity and insight, and to move beyond the bounds of his self-absorbed bitterness and misery. As he stands and shivers, it dawns on him that his kingdom is full of people whose whole lives are consumed by the abandoned, defenseless suffering that he is going through right now... Shakespeare is telling us that the dreadful naked reality of the ‘unaccommodated man’ is the point from which accommodation must be made, the only ground on which real community can grow.¹¹

We might say that while Americans are not generally searching for revolutionary correctives to our problems, what Berman describes in *Lear* is what we expect today from our politicians in return for granting them political legitimacy: that they disrobe from their veils, vestiges and masks of office, title, and social distinction to, as was famously repeated in American electoral politics, “feel our pain.” The politics of authenticity hold that only with this transparency be-

¹⁰ Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (London: Verso, 2009), xiii.

¹¹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 107-8.

tween politicians and the people, and then among the people themselves, do we have a true democracy.

But not all think that an expressive freedom grounded in the inner realm of the individual is real freedom, or that it necessarily does or should have anything to do with politics at all. While we often equate democracy with the protection and promotion of individual realization within the self, it has not always been thus. In an essay in which she lauds the freedom of ancient Greek citizens, political theorist Hannah Arendt harkens back to an ancient conception of freedom not as a private or personal matter, but fundamentally as a public one, constituted outside the individual self in “the world”:

[i]n spite of the great influence the concept of an inner, non-political freedom has exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality. We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves. Before it became an attribute of thought or a quality of the will, freedom was understood to be the free man’s status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in deed and word. Freedom needed... the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them – a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could assert himself by word and deed.¹²

Hence, we see two different types of politics: the politics of authenticity and the politics of theatricality (or as I will sometimes call it, the politics of performativity). While there are many differences between the two models the most glaring is that authentic politics focuses on the individual while theatrical politics focuses on the public.

Both models are concerned, however, with the disintegration, the colonization, or the simple loss of “the self”, as they conceive it, throughout modernity. The fear of modernity, from

¹² Hannah Arendt, “What Is Freedom?” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 442.

both types of politics, has always been that individuals do not listen to their own inner voices and are too influenced by others around them. Modern thinkers have always feared that instead of defining themselves, men and women would blindly follow the opinions of others and other social forces that demanded group cohesion and destroyed individuality. During the rise of the common man in Jacksonian America, Tocqueville famously warned of the power of public opinion, with all of its ability to fashion beliefs and behaviors, to conquer and crush individuality since free thinkers face a fate worse than oppression: aloneness:

Tyranny in democratic republics does not proceed [as it used to]... It ignores the body and goes straight for the soul. The master no longer says: You will think as I do or die. He says: You are free not to think as I do. You may keep your life, your property, and everything else. But from this day forth you shall be as a stinger among us. You will retain your civic privileges, but they will be of no use to you. For if you seek the votes of your fellow citizens, they will withhold them, and if you seek only their esteem, they will feign to refuse even that. You will remain among men, but you will forfeit your rights to humanity. When you approach your fellow creatures, they will shun you as one who is impure. And even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you, lest they, too, be shunned in turn. Go in peace, I will not take your life, but the life I leave you with is worse than death.¹³

A half century later, Nietzsche was already writing the postmortem on the possibilities for modern individuality, since a modern culture that valued it so much paradoxically tended to do away with it:

The modern spirit, with its restlessness, its hatred for bounds and moderation, has come to dominate every domain, at first let loose by the fever of revolution and then, when assailed by fear and horror of itself, again laying constraints upon itself.¹⁴

¹³ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 294.

¹⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 103.

The emergence of “mass society” that grew out of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth spawned a new series of critiques of this conformist modern self by political and social theorists, especially those from the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer and Adorno lamented the rise of the “culture industry” which homogenized culture, manipulated the mass public, and robbed people of their individuality.¹⁵ In *Escape From Freedom*, Erich Fromm echoes Nietzsche’s characterization of modern individuals’ self-imposed captivity; individuals accept conformity and authoritarianism in the face of political and existential groundlessness. Like many midcentury critics worried about escapes from freedom, Fromm thought modern individuals were not really free; “happy slaves” as Rousseau referred to modern individuals in the eighteenth century. He applies this fear to the highly-valued American right of free speech:

Although freedom of speech constitutes an important victory in the battle against old restraints, modern man is in a position where much of what ‘he’ thinks and says are the things that everybody else thinks and says; that he has not acquired the ability to think originally - that is, for himself - which alone gives meaning to his claim that nobody can interfere with the expression of his thoughts.¹⁶

Not only do we subconsciously follow the herd, but we actively fear and escape freedom:

The frightened individual seeks for somebody or something to tie his self to, he cannot bear to be his own individual self any longer, and he tries frantically to get rid of it and to feel security again by the elimination of this burden: the self.¹⁷

In the face of self-abandonment, Fromm’s corrective is self-realization:

We forget that, although each of the liberties which have been won must be defended with utmost vigor, the problem of freedom is not only a quantitative one,

¹⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002), 97.

¹⁶ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, (New York: H. Holt, 1994), 105.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

but a qualitative one; that we not only have to preserve and increase the traditional freedom, but that we have to gain a new kind of freedom, one which enables us to realize our own individual self; to have faith in this self and in life.¹⁸

Postwar critiques of the modern self from critics like David Riesman and Nathan Glazer painted an even bleaker picture for the possibility for individual autonomy. They focus on the rise of the suburbs, the bureaucratic state, and an advanced industrialized world that characterized an even more homogenized mass society in which individuals became increasingly “other-directed.”¹⁹ Individuals came to completely rely on the fashions, opinions, and consumer behaviors of others for their own shallow identities. While a bounty of consumer products satiated biological needs to create a comfortable life, the self was lost in conformity. Worse, driving this conformity was the hidden, mostly unconscious pressure from one’s peers:

[s]table and individualistic pursuits are today being replaced by the fluctuating tastes which the other-directed person accepts from his peer-group. Moreover, many of the desires that drove men to work and to madness in societies depending on inner-direction are now satisfied relatively easily; they are incorporated into the standard of living taken for granted by millions. But the craving remains.²⁰

The shallowness, conformity, and external role-playing of this postwar lifestyle became the backdrop for the critique of the New Left. The Port Huron Statement issued by Students for a Democratic Society argued that “[t]he goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image of popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally au-

¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁹David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Ibid., 79.

thetic.”²¹ Betty Friedan presented a picture of existential meaninglessness American women faced in their own externally-defined roles:

Each suburban wife struggles with [meaninglessness] alone. As she made the bed, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night - she was afraid to ask even of herself, ‘Is this all?’²²

Since the rise of the New Left in the 1960s, personal authenticity was lauded as the conjuring outward of an inner voice that had been hidden by external pressures and oppressions.

Each vision of authenticity then led to some vision of an intimate democratic, egalitarian society populated by citizens who privately realize and then publicly express themselves. This connection between authentic personal discovery and a democratic public space for that expression can be summarized in the famous feminist assertion that “the personal is political.” This blurring of the lines between what is private and what is public goes back to the early days of modern political thought, most aptly captured in the writing of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Authenticity and Theatricality

While both authentic and theatrical politics worry about the loss of self in the modern world, they disagree firstly on how the self was lost and secondly how to reconstitute it. The object of this dissertation will be to understand how these two different sides of the coin describe the problem and what they prescribe as correctives to it. The main representatives I will employ are Jean-Jacques Rousseau for authentic politics, Hannah Arendt for theatrical politics, and Hen-

²¹ Students for a Democratic Society "The Port Huron Statement" in *American Political Thought*, by Kenneth M. Dolbeare (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1998), 490.

²² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 1.

ry David Thoreau as a thinker who finds a middle way between the opposing models by blending the best of both worlds.

For Rousseau, the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere does not usher in a new age of individual freedom. Instead, bourgeois individuals define themselves based on what they perceive others think of them. In order to gain the favor of others, they perform public personas that mimic others. As the donning of this other-directed mask becomes a way of life, their private selves are submerged and they become their personas. Yet, behind the public persona rests the latent, internal potential for autonomy and conscientious compassion. The “doubleness” of the bourgeois that Rousseau laments is evidenced in the splitting of the public persona from the hidden, private realm where these traits persist, however remotely. Rousseau’s corrective to this self-alienation is to unify these realms. He achieves this, in *Emile* and in his autobiographical works, by first cultivating these traits within the individual before he enters the public realm. Having regained one’s potential for natural autonomy and compassion, one is then equipped to live with others without giving up one’s selfhood. Individuals will no longer perform the mimicry of a public persona they adopt from others but will express their individual consciences instead. We see that Rousseau’s politics of authenticity unifies the self by bringing together the latent goodness of the individual with its subsequent outward manifestation in the public sphere. The personal and public dimensions of the self are thus collapsed into one unified, authentic subject.

Arendt argues that Rousseau has aided in depoliticizing the modern world by shifting the focus of politics from the public to the private realm. Under the politics of authenticity, public judgment and governmental coercion are focused on the hidden, private intentions of individual

actors rather than on the visible acts they perform in public. The erosion of the public sphere has left mass man no space in which to individuate oneself among others. The lack of the public sphere leads to the destruction of the private sphere. Men and women have been cut off from the “common sense” one needs to experience with others to confirm one’s very existence as an individual. Arendt refers to this experience of the loss of self as “loneliness.” Totalitarian ideologies perpetuate loneliness by giving the individual solutions to existential malaise that promise the end of politics. Men and women are reduced to automatons without the ability to think or act. As a corrective, Arendt offers a politics that reestablishes the division between the private and public dimensions of the self in order to protect the integrity of each. In the private realm, Arendt promotes thinking in solitude as the “two-in-one.” This is a private inner dialogue in which one “internalizes the audience” of the outside world before acting in the public realm among others. This differs from the Rousseauist variant of pre-political solitude, which requires one to be cut off from the influence of public opinion in order to achieve autonomy. In the public realm, Arendt celebrates a theatrical politics. The mask or *persona* of each public actor gives one a common status among equals, as it is “affixed to the actor’s face by the exigencies of the play.” The public actor can then individuate oneself by performing heroic words and deeds that are recognized by one’s audience. The mask also serves the function of protecting the private self from external public judgment or governmental coercion.

Like Rousseau and Arendt, Thoreau seeks a politics that equips the self with the ability to achieve individuality, both when alone and when acting in public. Throughout his writings he recognizes and then resists what Jane Bennett calls “the They” within himself. In order to achieve this, Thoreau alternates between Rousseauist and Arendtian modes of politics. At times

he rejects the mimicry of others by leaving the public realm to rediscover his individual nature in private. At other times he individuates himself among others by performing a persona to public audiences. In both his private writings and his public actions, he transcends the tension between Rousseau's collapsing of the private and public dimensions of the self and Arendt's strict division between those dimensions.

Thoreau exhibits strong Rousseauist features when he writes about the recovery of his authentic individuality. Like Rousseau's autobiographical works, *Walden* gives readers an exposé into Thoreau's self-recovery by cataloguing his daily thoughts and activities in solitude. There are passages from *Walden* in which Thoreau recognizes that the development of his own unique individuality would not be possible if he were subjected to bombardment from public opinion in town among his neighbors. Thoreau also exhibits Rousseauist features in "Civil Disobedience." Here, he writes about how his inner conscience is the motivation for his public actions. By expressing his conscience to the community, he blurs the line dividing his private world of conscience and his public persona in an attempt to provoke others to listen to their own consciences.

In others ways, Thoreauvian politics contains prominent Arendtian features. While *Walden* allows a window into the Thoreau's private thoughts and activities, he resists going the full Rousseauist route of expressive intimacy by creating buffers between himself and his readers. Spatially, Walden Pond is "one mile from any neighbor" which, as Cavell notes, is "just far enough to be seen clearly."²³ Much like the function achieved by Arendt's mask, Thoreau's one-

²³ Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 11.

mile distance serves as a buffer between him and his audience, yet it is also close enough for his voice to “sound through” to his readers. In a passage from *Walden*, he details the necessity of “sufficient distance” between individuals so that they “have considerable neutral ground between them” for their “sentences to unfold.” Behind Thoreau’s obscured literary persona, he is engaged in the process of thinking, which as he notes in *Walden*, contains a “certain doubleness.” We can see that this is not unlike the “two-in-one” Arendt celebrates in her Socratic theory of thinking.

Both Rousseauist and Arendtian features are contained in Thoreau’s more explicitly political writings. In his most famous political writing “Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau calls his audience’s attention to his private conscience in order to provoke theirs. But in a lesser known speech called “A Plea for Captain John Brown”, he uses an Arendtian mode of political performance not in order to express his inner conscience but to create a public object for judgment by using shocking rhetorical imagery about John Brown’s Christ-like qualities. While it may have been motivated by Thoreau’s inner conscience, Thoreau directs his audience’s judgment not to his own moral law within but to an object outside and between himself and his readers: the great and heroic deeds of John Brown.

With these three theorists, we can better understand the anxieties about the modern self in the modern age and hopefully, about the problems that “the self” faces in our twenty first century context.

Other Modern Discourses

The tension between the politics of authenticity and the politics of theatricality is similar to other classic debates in political theory. And many times (but not all the time), the assump-

tions inherent within each side of these other debates are the same assumptions authenticity and theatricality employ. The old tension between republicanism and liberalism is one example of the ways in which the authenticity vs. theatricality debate can expand beyond the narrow foci of each. While both liberalism and republicanism share a belief in individual freedom, they weigh it differently against the need for community and collective action. As their ideal types, liberalism tends to prioritize individual liberty, privacy, commerce, competition, and shuns too much intimacy in collective action while accepting complex institutions of government. Republicanism prioritizes community, transparency, virtue, cooperation, and encourages the development of bonds of civic friendship in collective action while favoring simpler, more directly democratic forms of government. This tension was especially pointed, for example, during the debates between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists over the US Constitution. While the Federalists favored a complex form of government that would encourage commercialism, competition, and distance between the people, the Anti-Federalists thought this would destroy virtue and the bonds of citizenship, leading the way to a shallow society of alienated selves that could unleash various forms of tyranny. In Cato's fifth letter, he warns that "the progress of a commercial society begets luxury, the parent of inequality, the foe to virtue"²⁴ For the democratic-republican Anti-Federalists, (like we shall see for theorists of authenticity from romantic, Enlightenment auto-critics to the counter-culture hippies of the 1960s) too much artificiality in a hyper-commercialized society kills the natural virtue within the self, leading to social inequality, lack of compassion among citizens, and a host of other undemocratic ills. For the liberal Federalists, coalitions

²⁴ George Clinton, "Cato Letter V," in *The Antifederalists*, by Cecelia M. Kenyon (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 308-9.

of citizens that were too democratic, and thus too tightly-knit would lead to a tyranny of the majority and by extension, the loss of individual freedom.

Political theorists have sought ways to join the benefits of both liberalism and democracy. Thomas Dumm writes in his book *Loneliness As A Way of Life* that ideally, democracy and liberalism can “enable each other”, constituting “a marvelously rich matrix, a culture for living our life in common and in solitude.”²⁵ This dissertation attempts to approach this “matrix” in which togetherness and aloneness, the self and the community, and ultimately, liberalism and republican democracy might thrive in tandem in our age. The way in which we reach this problem is through the debate between authenticity, which argues for transparency and intimacy among individual selves in a community that makes up the polity, and theatricality, which argues for opacity and distance between citizens who are joined only through impersonal political institutions and processes.

Still, the fact that the problem of aloneness vs. togetherness can be expressed in different ways begs the question, why the precise focus on the politics of authenticity vs. the politics of theatricality as an important discussion? The reasons are several. Firstly, it is a rich debate that spans the last several centuries since the Enlightenment. No one has written an intellectual history on this precise tension. And while this dissertation is not a detailed, chronological intellectual history of the debate, it can provide a theoretical framework with which one could start if one wished to write such a history. Secondly, the debate briefly summarized above between liberalism and republicanism is still debated today, both in academia and in policy debates out in public (even if these precise terms are not used as widely). Proxy debates between the individual and

²⁵ Thomas Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008), 31.

the community, liberty and equality, and agonal competition and democratic cooperation can help us better understand our continuing ideological differences between liberalism and republican democracy.

Thirdly, this moment in history requires us to take stock of what constitutes us as selves and where we fit in politically. What has fallen out of fashion in both academia and popular culture in general since the 1970s are questions about the nature of the self in politics. Regardless of one's ideology, how ought one do politics in the twenty-first century? How ought one present a particular political point in a way that either fulfills one's need for public expression, persuades other people, has a real impact in public policy, or some combination of all three of these ends of politics? Ought one *express* politics (following the authentic model) or *perform* it (following the theatrical model)? When we say something about politics, are we revealing something about ourselves or are we donning the common mask of "citizen" as an equal member of a political community? Should we act honestly, authentically, and sincerely when acting in public or do those morally-loaded values matter when we are discussing public policy? If one seeks to make a difference in the world of politics (or any other realm of public life) isn't it more effective to gain attention to the *issue* rather than the way one subjectively *feels* about the issue? For example, is not shocking an audience with a controversial utterance over an issue a much more "political" act than simply saying honestly what what thinks about it?

To complicate, yet elucidate matters, we must ask: if we are to get away from the perils of politics that rely too much on authenticity and not enough on issues, can a theatrical model of politics work anymore? Are Americans even capable of being shocked and thus mobilized politically anymore by political theatre? After a half century in which "obscene" rock music, raunchy

comedians, shock jock radio, pornography, and the like have become popularized and normalized, are the “audiences” of American politics too desensitized to be affected by theatrical political acts? Even if they are not, do these acts end up casting light on issues (political entities) or on personalities (non-political entities)? Further, with the proliferation of technologies and social media (the internet, micro-blogging, etc) that create a crowded playing field for new ideas, is a new age of an inward-retreat probable? Is it necessary for us to rediscover who we ought to be in public life? Or do these new technologies and media formats actually give us radically new types of spaces in which to act politically? In short, what are the possibilities for politics in twenty-first century America and how might we, as selves, achieve it? This dissertation does not answer all these questions completely, but it attempts to give us a framework to do so. By investigating other theories and moments in history that seek to find a home for the self in a complex, often alienating public world, we can elucidate our own political and existential predicaments and hopefully, reimagine new ways that both the inner self and community-oriented citizenship might flourish.

CHAPTER TWO: The Politics of Authenticity

In this chapter I wish to show the connection between the demand for personal authenticity and emancipatory movements for social justice in modernity. As with Socrates and other pre-modern social and political reformers, the modern discourse of authenticity attempts to dig below conventions and appearances, to get the self to know itself, and to achieve transparency between the self and others, and between society and governing institutions. Beneath the false consciousness of oneself, there are both dark motives and unrealized potential for happiness and for political agency. Behind the role-playing of other public persons are these same hidden traits. And behind seemingly fair and open economic and political systems are spaces for dominance and exploitation that must be brought to the attention of the public. Advocates for authenticity are willing to make public spaces that were previously considered private if they believe they harbor or instigate injustice or if publicizing private experiences makes a contribution to what they consider a more just democratic sphere.

We can understand the politics of authenticity by laying out its metaphysical worldview from its foundational writers and from real world events. The most celebrated proponent of this metaphysics was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Others who contributed to it include Martin Luther, Karl Marx, and in America, as I argue, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and some of the New England Transcendentalists. We can also see the importance of the politics of authenticity in the American and French Revolutions, in Jacksonian politics, and in the social movements of the 1960s. To break the formalism of the ancient regime, the Jacobins had to strip away its costumes to reveal the self. To strip away the oppression of American slavery, which dehumanized individuals, Douglass had to show himself as a real human being. Stanton, similarly, had to

base her arguments on her biography of oppression to challenge patriarchy. And the Transcendentalists had to reconnect deeply with a sense of self in order to protest the shallowness of a bustling commercial society in America. Authenticity has also been used on the right by reactionaries and conservatives like Father Coughlin, Pitchfork Ben Tillman, Ronald Reagan, Sarah Palin, and most recently, Donald Trump. For some, like for their predecessors on the left, it signaled an emancipation from formalisms and costumes. In general, across the spectrum, we can say that to be perceived as authentic, especially in American political culture, is to be perceived as a legitimate public actor. The populist's favorite tool in combatting the status quo has always been to "get real" with his or her audience while at the same time, the audience seems to understand itself as "real" through the address of the speaker.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is the most prominent and influential figure in the modern discourse on the politics of authenticity. A philosopher, writer and at a time, composer from Protestant Geneva, he was famously contradictory in his arguments. Rousseau gives us a politics that promises radical individuality while at the same time traps us in the confines of organic community. He seeks to advance humanity toward its natural happiness while accepting and promoting the project of "denaturing" man. He promotes direct democracy yet often falls into totalitarian language. He is a romantic yet believes in the supremacy of reason. And he seeks to protect the sovereignty of the inner self while opening it up to manipulation and even, some would argue, disintegration by outside institutions and persons. While I do pay some attention to Rousseau's communitarian sides in this chapter, I emphasize his main object of inquiry at the starting and ending points of his career, the centerpiece of his contribution to the Enlightenment, and the object which future Rousseauist romantic reformers and revolutionaries would later emphasize: the

integrity of the inner self in a social world that constantly threatens to colonize it. From here, I will be able to differentiate this form of politics from other forms that focus public judgment not on persons, but on disembodied actions in public life.

Rousseau's politics was based on a new and radical metaphysics. Jason Neidleman shows that Rousseau believed that philosophy should not be studied for its own sake, but should take on a moral dimension in the service of human happiness. This stance against the formal, impersonal discipline of philosophy, according to Neidleman, puts Rousseau in the same category as Kierkegaard and Socrates, and firmly against Hegel, Descartes, and other metaphysicians who deal in abstractions. The only way one can begin to search for this kind of moral truth is to examine first and foremost one's relation to oneself. Rather than examining the external world of others, God, or some notion of a well-ordered cosmos, Rousseau urged the self to explore the *sentiment interieur*. This was merely an avenue to this moral truth of human happiness, not an end to the quest for truth itself. Along this journey, one must judge the validity of moral truth based on its utility, autonomy, immediacy, and simplicity. This leads to a number of implications. Moral truth must be *useful* toward the goal of human happiness. The search for moral truth must be guided through examination of one's inner conscience as an outsider apart from the community (since the external world riddled with *amour propre* is no reliable source for morality). Moral truth must be discovered through an immediately felt experience rather than based on theory or conjecture dictated by outside forces. And finally, the moral truths realized ought to be simple rather than convoluted or sophisticated. This had plagued European philosophy and allowed room for philosophers to indulge in useless philosophical banter, getting us further away

from authentic human happiness.²⁶ In other words, by saying that humans are *naturally* good, Rousseau and others after him who believed in authenticity equate (and some would say more despairingly, conflate) inner truth with inner morality.

This radically subjective philosophical stance leads to a politics in which the authentic self is an outsider, equipped to speak honestly from the heart even when among others in physical proximity. The self is governed by the dictates of one's inner conscience rather than by external laws. This way of thinking about the self has led to ideologies that have led to a "virtue of selfishness" that encourages the self to split off from the community.²⁷ Yet the more democratic politics of authenticity has provided a moral foundation for revolutionaries and reformers to resist injustice and somewhat paradoxically, to join in even more intimate communities with like-minded conscientious objectors who are also occluded. Relatedly, it leads Rousseau to reject the social conventions of the emerging bourgeois public sphere, where men and women speak and act not as authentic selves but as actors playing roles on a public stage. This hostile stance toward social roles has shared much with the identity politics of emancipatory movements ever since, in which the stifling social identities of the oppressed are identified and then overcome through public speech and action.

In his plea for the authenticity of modern political actors, Rousseau was railing against what he saw as two realities of his time: the ruling political structure of the *ancien regime* and the emerging bourgeois public sphere in the social realm that would eventually replace it. While

²⁶ Jason, Neidleman, "The Sublime Science of Simple Souls: Rousseau's Philosophy of Truth," *History of European Ideas* 39.6 (2013), 815-34.

²⁷ Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden, *The Virtue of Selfishness, a New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

the former held individual identities captive behind formal, hierarchical roles held over from the medieval world, the latter created a more fluid world of movement among public actors with a multiplicity of roles. But this new form of public action was exercised by individuals still trapped behind performative public masks. While they were different in the way they dispersed authority, the old medieval forms of government and society were similar to emerging modern forms in that individuals were defined by external considerations, whether titles or costumes, rather than by one's unique individuality.

Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* critiques the artificiality and material luxury of modern civilization. It argues that the seeming advancements of civilization that were lauded during the Enlightenment were caused by human vanity. Philosophers, of course, have been making a similar argument for thousands of years (Ecclesiastes famously lamented that "all is vanity"). Yet what was new about Rousseau's critique was that this move from costumed politics to authentic politics had world historical implications, moving humanity out of one age and into the next. While ancient and medieval cultures expressed vanity in the costumes of court life and social titles, modern culture expressed vanity through science and commerce. In a striking passage meant to shock Enlightenment philosophes whom Rousseau saw as self-congratulating, he argues that

[a]stronomy was born out of superstition, eloquence of ambition, hatred, falsehood, and flattery; geometry of avarice; physics of an idle curiosity; all, even moral philosophy, of human pride. Thus the arts and sciences owe their birth to our vices; we should be less doubtful of their advantages, if they had sprung from our virtues.²⁸

²⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*" in *The Social Contract And Discourses*, trans. G.D.H Cole (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 62.

They not only spring from human vanity, but these modern arts and sciences perpetuate it: “[a]s the conveniences of life increase, as the arts are brought to perfection, and luxury spreads, true courage flags, military virtues disappear, and all this is the effect of the sciences and of those arts which are exercised in the privacy of men’s dwellings.”²⁹ The rest of European society was celebrating the potential of science and technology to conquer ignorance and want and material misery that had always plagued humanity. Yet for Rousseau, these modern sciences and arts distract us from our inner selves and by extension, from each other. What should truly matter to human beings is being true to one’s inner self and the public virtues of citizenship that will organically follow from that.

Rousseau’s critique of bourgeois society gets to the root of the psychological condition of individuals when they affix their attention to artificial, external considerations. In his *Letter to D’Almbert*, we see Rousseau use a discussion of theatre to make this same point on a political level. As Robert Politzer points out, “Rousseau’s discussion of the theatre...should be interpreted as being simultaneously a discussion of art and society, and of fiction and reality in which the theatre and the actor become the symbols of society and social man.”³⁰ Rousseau expresses his dislike of theatre as an art form and of the everyday cultural practice of theatricality more generally. His critique is leveled at two activities: actors performing and audiences watching performances, and the more general idea that the regular practice of performing or going to the theatre makes hypocrites out of both performers and spectators. Firstly, he believes that the performances themselves perpetuate the debasement of artistic integrity among actors and artistic ap-

²⁹ Ibid., 20

³⁰ Robert L. Politzer, "Rousseau on the Theatre and the Actors," *Romantic Review* 46 (1955), 250-257.

preciation among audiences, alienating both sides. The performing artist merely basks in the applause received from the audience while the audience itself is happy with mediocre works of art that confirm their own substandard tastes and debased morals. “Every artist loves applause” Rousseau regrets. The audience will already have had their tastes corrupted as “the necessary consequence of luxury.” From here, the artist “will lower his genius to the level of the age, and will rather submit to compose mediocre works, that will be admired during his lifetime, than labor at sublime achievements which will not be admired till long after he is dead.”³¹ Spectators identify with and adopt the act of donning a performative mask when they gaze upon these acts. Lionel Trilling says of this impersonation that for Rousseau, “[t]he spectator...contracts by infection the characteristic disease of the actor, the attenuation of selfhood that results from impersonation.”³²

Coupled with the self-debasing practice of impersonation is the fact that by attending these performances, audiences are able to pretend for a time that they feel for others and identify with their plights. They are able to evade personal responsibility for civic virtue by ventriloquizing pity through actors on a stage. Rousseau thus laments in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*:

I have said elsewhere why feigned miseries affect us more than do genuine ones. There are people who sob at tragedies but never in their lives took pity on a single unhappy person. The invention of the theatre is marvelously suited to make our self-love feel proud of all the virtues we do not have.³³

³¹ Rousseau, "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences," 19.

³² Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), 69-70.

³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Gottfried Herder, *On the Origin of Language*, ed. Moran, John H. and Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 8.

We see a connection in Rousseau's thought here between the evasion of civic virtue and the de-based practice of theatrical play-acting. Rousseau was rejecting both the types of public action in which people engaged and the existence of a stage from which this action was performed. He did not wish to see political agency of the self initiated or expressed from a stage, but rather, from within. Thus importantly, the traditional language of the "political stage" in which citizens are "actors" who perform roles was one Rousseau found troubling since it gave society the ability to evade moral injustices under the surface of public life.

Rousseau's problem was not just with stage actors. It was much more pervasive. Marshall Berman details how for Rousseau, the theatricality of everyday bourgeois public life is a demonstration of performance and modern self-alienation and thus, a widespread lack of personal authenticity. In modern Paris, Rousseau's character St. Preux from his novel *Julie* observes, there are many visible acts performed by mobile public actors, but "when a man speaks, it's his costume, not he, that's expressing a feeling." Amid a plethora of public acts, St. Preux sees restless alienated performers "become different from what they are" in order to flatter, impress, or compete with others for stature, wealth, power, or self-worth. Through these activities, any self worth one gains is relative to what others think, of and to one's position above or below them. Although modern individuals believe they have become sovereign individualists, they possess merely public personas and suffer from a "profound passivity underneath" their masks as they define themselves relative to others. In Berman's reading of Rousseau, modern individuals are "just as alienated from themselves as were the aristocrats, peasants, and artisans" of traditional,

³⁴ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 115-16.

rural society.³⁴ For Both Rousseau and for Berman, the psychic state of the individual had not transformed in the new modern age as it had been promised.

For Rousseau, the mask donned by the bourgeois allows one to both relate to and compete with others in the political, social, and economic marketplaces. But as one's motives become tied to those external activities, the individual becomes more alienated from the nature of the inner self and inner motives both multiply and become more malleable. Rousseau laments that the unnatural, externally-directed motives of "jealousy, suspicion, fear, coldness, reserve, and hate" are hidden underneath the mask. Theatrical culture "make[s] men double"; there is a silent struggle between their natural potential for goodness and the unnatural public masks they don.³⁵ Arthur Melzer notes that for Rousseau, the bourgeois is self-alienated because of the psychic disunity this struggle entails. The bourgeois is at peace with neither of his "two lives," which denigrate both the private and public experiences of the self.³⁶ The bourgeois is somewhere in between, living neither the harmonious, inward existence of natural, presocial savage in solitude, nor the harmonious, outward existence of the citizen acting in public among equals. Worse, this inward world remains unexamined by the modern self, since there are no political or educational mechanisms that could urge introspection.

So what are the characteristics of this presocial, natural self before this split? We get a picture from his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Here, Rousseau conjectures a state of nature in which man originally existed before the artificial inventions of civil society and gov-

³⁵ Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Arts and Sciences," 7.

³⁶ Arthur Melzer, "Rousseau and the Problem of Bourgeois Society," *American Political Science Review* 74.4 (1980), 1031.

ernment. He attempts to study mankind anthropologically and psychologically. He describes a savage being in nature who can meet one's own physical needs, does not require help or approval from others, and perhaps most importantly for Rousseau's conjecture of man's natural psychology, the savage does not have the faculty of instrumental reason that is used to engage in comparison and competition with others. Rousseau calls this state *amour de soi*, a "self-love" in which one has no need for others because one is perfectly at peace and can survive on one's own.³⁷ The little relation that savage man has with others is governed by pity, a repugnance to seeing others suffer, which will be important in the development of a moral consciousness later. Psychologically and spiritually, the savage lives in the moment from within and thus has no need to change one's being in the presence of others. The soul is united into one rather than split, or double.

Rousseau paints a romantic picture of the self in this state:

His imagination paints no pictures; his heart makes no demands on him. His few wants are so readily supplied, and he is so far from having the knowledge which is needful to make him want more, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity. The face of nature becomes indifferent to him as it grows familiar. He sees in it always the same order, the same successions: he has not understanding enough to wonder at the great miracles; nor is it in his mind that we can expect to find that philosophy that man needs, if he is to know how to notice for once what he sees everyday. His soul, which nothing disturbs, is wholly wrapped up in the feeling of its present existence...³⁸

While it is more accepted in today's discourses on the self in political theory, Rousseau here stressed that we are born with a natural self. In order to retain its integrity, this self ought not be socially constructed, but it must somehow maintain its sovereignty even amidst a fluctuating so-

³⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" in *The Social Contract And Discourses*, trans. G.D.H Cole (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 43.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

cial and political world external to ourselves. We see here Rousseau's romanticizing of stillness and aloneness in contrast to the dynamism and togetherness of modern civil society. Good point.

We see a similar description of the stillness experienced in this sentiment de l'existence in Rousseau's autobiographical *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Here, Rousseau's quest for moral truth fulfills the criteria set out in his moral philosophy of utility, autonomy, immediacy, and simplicity:

If there is a state where the soul can find a resting place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our soul entirely, as long as this state lasts, we can call ourselves happy, not with a poor, incomplete, and relative happiness such as we find in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient complete and perfect happiness which leaves no emptiness to be filled in the soul.³⁹

In these two passages Rousseau idealizes solitude over togetherness, stillness over movement, unity over doubleness, and being over appearing.

This distinction between being and appearing is especially pertinent in Rousseau's later prescriptions for intersubjectivity in public life. As mentioned before, Rousseau laments the play-acting and costume-wearing he saw in modern Parisian society. He loathes it because it "make[s] men double." In our natural state, Rousseau conjectures, "men found their security in how easily they saw through one another" when "outer appearances were always the likeness of the heart's dispositions."⁴⁰ Once savage man left the parasitic state of nature, he entered a state

³⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1992), 68-9.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, "A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality", 6.

in which “one had to seem other than one in fact was. To be and to appear became two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake.”⁴¹ With the entrance of civil society comes the development of opacity among individuals and thus, a lack of trust.

Rousseau’s task becomes to ensure that the modern individual can develop and maintain one’s authenticity intact in a fallen world. In order to understand how the politics of authenticity sees the self in relation to society and politics, we need to examine how this moral development is cultivated by Rousseau in a dialectical way through education and governmental institutions. First we need to note three important considerations that allow Rousseau to reconcile his thinking about individuality to his thinking about society and politics. Firstly, Rousseau admits that his version of the state of nature should not be taken as an absolute and that it would, in fact, be impossible to know exactly what the original condition of human beings was before civil society and government:

Like the statue of Glaucus, which was so disfigured by time, seas, and tempests, that it looked more like a wild beast than a god, the human soul, altered in society by a thousand causes perpetually recurring, by the acquisition of a multitude of truths and errors, by the changes happening to the constitution of the body, and by the continual jarring of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance, so as to be hardly recognizable. Instead of a being, acting constantly from fixed and invariable principles, instead of that celestial and majestic simplicity, impressed on it by its divine Author, we find it only the frightful contrast of passion mistaking itself for reason, and of understanding grown delirious.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid., 95.

⁴² Ibid., 42.

Additionally, Rousseau admits that in attempting to describe mankind's original nature, he may have "involuntarily put in something of my own."⁴³ Secondly, the savage man that Rousseau idealizes ultimately falls from grace once the wicked artifice of reason, the presence of other persons, and thus a competitive spirit (which corresponds to bourgeois notions of private property) take hold.⁴⁴ The civilized individual begins accumulating material goods and needs more and more. This creates an imbalance between one's wants and one's ability to satisfy those wants which quickly become needs. Thus, a society is created to provide for those needs. Individuals lose their naturalness by surrounding themselves with artifice that bring their attention out of themselves. Reforming the self, society, and government needs to take this new reality into consideration as it moves forward.

Thirdly, as Guignon notes, because Rousseau never quite belonged to any nation, he argued that he is well equipped to speak in universal terms in his autobiographical works, since his self-analysis does not correspond to any political or linguistic perspective.⁴⁵ We will see how Rousseauist metaphysics and politics work in tandem with one's private biography to inform one's public politics. For reformers and revolutionaries who are oppressed or occluded from the political system, their only recourse is to argue from personal experience. This perspective affords them an unbiased universality because they do not hold the same national or ideological baggage as do those who are enfranchised by the system.

⁴³ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁵ Charles B. Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2004), 67.

Lastly and most importantly, we need to consider again Rousseau's metaphysical views and personal quest for moral truth. In a move that would animate the thought of other Enlightenment philosophers like Kant, as well as social reformers throughout modernity, Rousseau overcomes the tension between self and society through the metaphysical idea that one can acquire universal moral truths about humanity through radical introspection. In "Being Authentic," Charles Guignon points out that for Rousseau, "[t]he turn inward is supposed to lead us to a dimension of the self that transcends our particularity. It is deep within myself that I find I am part of Nature or The World Spirit or Humankind or the realm of imagination, creativity and beauty."⁴⁶ According to Charles Taylor, what is "modern" about the universality of the truths discovered through this introspection is that the inner voice that one hears upon introspection is some conception of nature and not, necessarily God.⁴⁷

This type of inward turn differentiates Rousseau from other modern thinkers in how he thinks about the self, society, and what introspection can tell us about moral universal political principles. Taylor notes that Locke, Descartes, and other bourgeois liberal rationalists despised by Rousseau see reason as the governing principle of the "punctual self." A number of implications stem from this rationalist principle. The self is seen as a *tabula rasa* with no preexisting inner content, shaped only by external environmental forces. Therefore, far from finding "the moral law within" to use the language of Kant, one finds nothing moral within oneself to explore. Self-knowledge becomes a scientific process of disengaging oneself and objectifying oneself from a distance in order to understand and then control one's thinking and behavior. At the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 366.

individual level, this disengaged reason, for Rousseau, alienates us from our natural, moral, spiritual unity and splits us into two. As Taylor notes, this creates the “central place of the disengaged, disciplinary stance to the self in our culture.”⁴⁸ This type of disengaged stance from the self then extends to our thoughts about society and politics to create a Hobbesian state of nature. Just as we have emptied and split ourselves, we empty others as well of their moral content, split from them, and then are forced to consider ways to control, compete with, and often manipulate others. At the social level, it prevents us from knowing each other in an honest and intimate way since we understand that all is surface, and that there is no moral content behind the masks of others we encounter in public life. And it also alienates us from our governing institutions, since we are also detached from politics at the individual and collective levels.

By contrast, Rousseau rejects the *tabula rasa* and has vision of “conscience” within. This conscience has the power to morally transform our will while also allowing us to see the moral transformations of others. But we need to directly experience the relation of ourselves to ourselves without rational detachment. As Jean Starobinski says of Rousseau’s impact, “we have moved from the realm of (historical) truth to that of authenticity.”⁴⁹ We move from an objective view of the self endorsed by liberalism and toward a subjective view of the self celebrated by the Rousseauists. By extension, the psychic disengagement we have from others would be collapsed if individuals spoke to one another from the heart and acknowledged each others’ intentions rather than speaking from a costume and acknowledging others’ costumes.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁹ Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jaques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London, 1988), 197.

Rousseau's writings idealize a complete and autonomous soul in solitude, yet in order to acknowledge the impossibility of going back to prelapsarian nature (or even knowing precisely what it is), Rousseau must detail how to create the autonomous citizen throughout one's educational development in real time. Progress beyond the shallow materialism and competitiveness of bourgeois society requires the transformation of the human will away from the vanities that resulted from savage man's self-alienating fall, which was unguided, and toward the guided development of individual moral conscience. This project is most systematically outlined in his educational novel *Emile*. Rousseau's teleology in *Emile* is to demonstrate how to educate a child from birth to adulthood in such a way that one's intellectual and physical development will be an unfolding of one's unique individuality and then how to protect and promote that individuality once one becomes an adult citizen.

He begins by insisting that children ought to be shielded from public opinion so that one discovers one's own authentic self in solitude before joining with others. Developing the self without interference from public opinion and with the aid of a tutor, Rousseau's pupil Emile is guided through experiences that create an equilibrium between his will and his power to achieve his will, an equilibrium which may have existed for savage man, but is always out of balance in bourgeois society. Having struck this equilibrium, Emile learns rationally (as savage man intuitively knew) that "he is always master of himself."⁵⁰ The approximation of the natural sentiment of existence makes the individual authentic and "truly one" rather than split between his

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, 40.

inner potential for individuality and the external, publicly-defined mask. It gives Emile “consciousness of the self” that makes him need “recourse to others less frequently.”⁵¹

But the unified self is always in danger of disintegration upon contact with others. Like all individuals, Emile has a proclivity to leave his natural, autonomous state and hand control of his selfhood over to others. The task of the tutor is to supply Emile with an agency that will unite him with others in such a way that preserves and enhances his authenticity rather than destroying it. This faculty is compassion or conscience, which approximates the *pitié* of presocial, natural man. In the amoral state of nature, *pitié* was a negative instinct, serving as a buffer between individuals and preventing anyone from desiring to harm anyone else, thus keeping each individual in solitude. But since individuals in society must be more active in their dealings with others, in order to protect their autonomy, the passiveness of *pitié* must be transformed into active compassion; a moral faculty that one exercises toward others. Compassion stems from the recognition of the “moral order” of society by the inner conscience and manifests outwardly in social commiseration. As Laurence Cooper argues, Rousseau’s compassion is meant to replace the alienating motivations of envy, mimicry, and competition as the modes of interaction between individuals.⁵² Although compassion is the foundation of intimate community that unites individuals in their common humanity, its ultimate function for Rousseau is to avoid such alienation and protect the autonomy of the individual who possesses it. This newly created individual, with the

⁵¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 161.

⁵² Laurence D. Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999), 98-100.

capacity for a radically individualistic autonomy as well as the capacity for intimate compassion, will be required for the social contract to hold.

The theatricality that Rousseau observed in Paris created an impersonal society where people lived in an unhappy state of limbo, alienated both from the capacity for natural freedom from within and alienated from the possibility for intimacy with others, both of which were necessary for civic freedom. This theatricality fostered an emerging liberal politics that both perpetuated the interpersonal alienation in the social realm as well as an unjust political system. Bourgeois liberalism, as a governmental form, had leveled out the alienating hierarchies of medieval society in which individuals were defined by external things like rank, title, and tradition. But at the same time, it was itself a type of new mask. It was a mask because it separated civil society from the state so the latter could protect what was considered the freedom and dynamism of freely-acting individuals in the former. Governmental laws, therefore, were seen as impersonal; detached from, and constitutionally, superior to the human minds that made them. Liberal government was, as John Adams proclaimed, “government of laws and not of men.” But as Berman details, for Rousseau, this is absurd, since “the state...grew organically out of social life.”⁵³ A government was made by humans and thus can be changed by humans. Since government is a direct reflection of civil society, it is responsible for its injustices and inequalities. It is not a protection of free, unchained actors in civil society, but a creator of chains directed from those with power in civil society; a “non-violent, psychic means for keeping men in their place.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 120.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

This merging of the state and civil society becomes an important focal point for modern reformers and revolutionaries. It allows for the possibility of government engaging in problems of civil society and reflecting them well, rather than leaving dynamism of civil society (which includes its inequalities and injustices if unregulated) alone to operate on its own. This critique of liberalism and the acknowledgement of the human design of government led to two vital elements of a Rousseauist model of direct democracy that would put popular control of government in the hands of the people rather than of impersonal, machine-like institutions and procedures. Firstly, it becomes impossible to argue that social injustices and inequalities are part of a natural and organic social fabric and that constitutional government must not overstep its boundaries by being involved in the solution for these social ills, since it is always involved in those ills. Secondly, it becomes impossible for government by representation to be a true reflection of the will of the people. Government by representation (at least in the creation of the laws), because it creates distance between the people themselves and their governors, will always serve one group over another, whether this is the rich over the poor, the established over the non-connected, or the representatives themselves over the people they represent. It is inescapable that governmental laws are always shaped by real human beings and are not impersonal and objective as liberalism argues.

Rousseau has the seemingly impossible task, then, of creating a government that is just while also assuming that it grows organically out of civil society in which much injustice already exists. An equally daunting task is creating a government which fosters and protects the radical individuality of unmasked individuals while making them citizens who rule themselves directly as part of a larger, collective social body that transcends the individual self. If we are to maintain

Rousseau's own assertion that his writings taken together created an "interconnected system" with only trivial contradictions, then we must attempt to see his *Social Contract* as a text which addresses and perhaps achieves both of these tasks in lights of his other writings.

Is Rousseau attempting to recover nature for mankind or to create citizens? Was Rousseau merely romanticizing a return of human beings back into beasts in a state of nature or does his political theory abandon the idealist anchor of nature and move instead, to the realist task of constructing an artificial political order? The answers to these are ambiguous. On the one hand, as he says in *Emile*, one cannot be man and citizen at the same time and thus, his job is to denature man. Yet in the *Social Contract*, Rousseau says in several passages that the new political society he is constructing will be founded on nature. The great paradox of the Social Contract is, as William Bluhm notes, that Rousseau "did denature man, and yet he did found his state on human nature."⁵⁵ We can say that by creating a dialectic between autonomy in a prepolitical state of nature nature and community in a civil state, Rousseau was attempting to bring human beings forward toward a happier, more just state of authenticity and self-rule in which nature is achieved rather than recovered.

In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau has two seemingly contradictory projects. One deals not with freedom but with legitimacy. Here, he abandons his romantic idealism of reproducing free and natural man and attempts instead to make mankind's chains "legitimate."⁵⁶ Yet while he does alter his reverence for natural freedom, he does not abandon it. In addition to legitimizing chains, his goal is to advance the project of autonomy for the individual where "each, while unit-

⁵⁵ William T. Bluhm, "Freedom in the Social Contract: Rousseau's Legitimate Chains," *Polity* 16.3 (1984), 363.

⁵⁶ Rousseau, "*A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*," 181.

ing himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.” The social contract that Rousseau stipulates “follow[s] from the nature of things.”⁵⁷ Clearly he is not referring to the nature of perfect stillness experienced by himself in his *Confessions* nor of the savage in his *Origins*, but a nature that is unfolding as humanity progresses; in other words, this is the same type of unfolding of “nature” through time, development, and guidance that *Emile* experiences. As he is led to improve his moral condition as he moves through stages of his own development, so too can humanity. Thus while nature is not as static here and is a more fluid concept than it is in Rousseau’s romantic writings, it still grounds him in an ideal to be achieved.

What allows Rousseau the room to alter his earlier more static view of prelapsarian nature is his belief in the transformation of the individual will move away from avarice (as savage man experienced without guidance) and toward virtue (as *Emile* experienced with guidance), if only it is cultivated by the right political institutions. On this point, we see as central Rousseau’s theory of the establishment of the general will, or popular sovereignty of the people in a direct democracy, the guidance from a wise public educator known as “the Lawgiver.” While Rousseau leaves the description of this figure or office ambiguous, he does say that this guiding hand will have to come from outside or prior to the social contract. The lawmaker, much like the tutor in *Emile*, will give to the people the proper moral code that will make it possible for them to exhibit the sorts of civic virtue necessary in a direct democracy.

Further, Rousseau alters his vision of nature not only based on the impact of public education on the moral transformation of individual wills, but also of the suprahuman force of history that can resolve certain dialectical tensions. Rousseau’s messianic view saw the movement

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

toward democracy as inevitable. The use of calculating reason that Rousseau saw and lamented in bourgeois society, once combined with the public value of authentic expression, will lead to the emancipation of those who are currently alienated from themselves and each other. Charles Taylor describes romanticism's view of history as "growth through a spiral, moving in the end towards a reconciliation of reason and feeling."⁵⁸ Specifically, this spiraling of these two opposing human faculties will lead to a celebratory democracy for Rousseau that values both compassion stemming from within individuals and collective intimacy that will break down the opaque barriers outside of and in between individuals. This belief that history is moving in the direction of progress, extending freedom, democracy, and happiness to more and more people, is a part of Enlightenment thinking that has always animated movements for social justice.

In addition to expressing and protecting individual authenticity, compassion creates an intimate community as a corrective to the vain egoism of bourgeois theatrical culture — a culture that, despite its egoism, practices a shallow individuality. Rousseau's Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre promotes a celebratory, participatory politics for republics in which authentic, unmasked autonomous actors, equipped with compassion from within, "assemble often" in the "festive air" and are brought together by "sweet bonds of pleasure and joy."⁵⁹ Marshall Berman argues that this celebratory compassion is meant to "bring people together in a new way through festivals of democracy" which will "set a vision of a spontaneous festival, in the open air...bringing all the people together, embodying and expressing their freedom."⁶⁰ Berman goes on to cel-

⁵⁸ Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self*, 366.

⁵⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Le Rond D'Alembert, *Politics and the Arts; Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 125.

⁶⁰ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, xii.

celebrate that in this participatory democracy, the people themselves are to be “the object of these entertainments” rather than being divided between actors and spectators.⁶¹ Charles Taylor notes that Rousseau’s “good political community is bound together by a sentiment which is an extension of the joy that humans feel in each others’ company, even in the most ordinary and intimate contexts.”⁶²

As Frederick Barnard argues, Rousseau’s ideal of patriotic citizenship unites individuals around the public expression of sentiment rather than their use of instrumental reason.⁶³ Since Rousseau believes that sentiment better approximates man’s natural authenticity and freedom than does reason, we can see how his equating of patriotic citizenship with sentimental expression likewise integrates the natural freedom of one’s private self with the civic freedom of one’s public self. Rousseau seeks to collapse and unite these often conflicting roles of the self to make the individual “truly one.” Notoriously, the creation of these authentic subjects does first involve political coercion, just as education of the pupil involves coercion by the tutor. Indeed, Rousseau famously declares in the *Social Contract* that those who do not voluntarily contract with the community must be “forced to be free.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Rousseau’s aim in such a process is to create a society where the individual remains “as free as before” he or she contracted with others. Rousseau’s exploration of the human heart has had the lingering effect of shifting politics away

⁶¹ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 215.

⁶² Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 366.

⁶³ Frederick Barnard, “Patriotism and Citizenship in Rousseau: A Dual Theory of Public Willing?,” *The Review of Politics* 46:2 (1984), 244.

⁶⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “*The Social Contract*” in *The Social Contract And Discourses*, trans. G.D.H Cole (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 195.

from the public words and deeds of men and women and into their private intentions and sentiments. The private realm, for Rousseau and his romantic predecessors, became political. In the end, this project begins and ends with the self. We do not develop a moral conscience, therefore, by adhering to the artificiality of external, impersonal laws meant to denaturalize us. Governance then becomes about

transforming each individual, who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being; of altering man's constitution for the purpose of strengthening it; and of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence nature has conferred on us all.⁶⁵

Thus, governance both springs from the discovery of natural moral conscience one discovers from introspection, and then has the end of strengthening it through political institutions.

The politics of authenticity that Rousseau systematized has is reflective of emancipatory democratic movements before, during, and after the Enlightenment. There are certain variations between different writers and activists that emphasize different parts of the Rousseauist paradigm when arguing for authenticity. One version emphasizes the recourse to private introspection to make a political argument about the larger social-political world. Another version emphasizes not only spiritual introspection about oneself, but the perspective of the lived experience of oppression or occlusion. And lastly, we see among many proponents of authenticity a call for democratic solidarity and identity politics to challenge oppression behind the closed doors of private spaces. What these variations share is a propensity for unmasked, moral truth-telling in the public sphere.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 214.

Rousseau's dedication to public truth-telling serves as a vital fulcrum in the history of authenticity. Historically and conceptually, Rousseau stands on the cusp of ancient and medieval sources of moral truth, which are theistic, and modern sources of truth which are secular, but often employ introspective and otherworldly sources of truth. What we see in public truth-telling could be considered a prophetic mode of politics. In prophesy, the source of truth for authentic politics is discovered in an otherworldly realm of being, outside the space of appearance. Often, the telling of it requires an adherence to a spiritual reality since destruction or imprisonment of the body by corrupt power structures is always a daunting possibility. Socrates, for example, shuns performance and speaks truth to the Athenian jury based on reference to the mystic Oracle of Delphi.⁶⁶ After such truth-telling, he does not fear death. Luther came to the door of the church in Wittenberg, facing the prospect of persecution, yet armed with the otherworldly and introspective truth that "it is not by works but by faith alone that man is saved."

In a more secular mode, we see this faith in latent, yet-to-be-manifested forces in the political prescriptions of the Jacobins, who argued for the transformation of the human will toward a republic of virtue in which truth was to be spoken transparently, publicly, and without veils. As Marisa Linton notes: "Revolutionary politics were constructed against old regime politics, and characterized in terms of polarities: virtue and corruption, transparency and secrecy authenticity and duplicity."⁶⁷ This transparency and lifting of the veil is seen in the radical American revolutionaries from America like Thomas Paine, who used the legitimizing force of nature to argue for

⁶⁶ Plato *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Death Scene from Phaedo*, G. M. A. Grube, and John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 2000).

⁶⁷ Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 285.

an uncovering of the oppressive veil with which England claimed dominion over the American colonies. Of English Kings, Paine wrote “could we take off the dark covering of antiquity and trace them to their first rise, we should find the first of them nothing better than the principal ruffian of some restless gang.” Instead of keeping citizens distant from each other and from government, Paine argues, “society promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections.” Paine was able to reach this truth through a radically subjectivist turn: “my own line of reasoning is to myself as straight and clear as a ray of light.”⁶⁸ In his essay *The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution*, Gordon Wood argues that Paine’s writing style *Common Sense* broke away from the gentlemanly literary and rhetorical customs of the day in its frankness, sincerity and populism:

[*Common Sense*] broke through the presuppositions of politics and offered new ways of conceiving of government that had not been said before. But some of the awe and consternation the pamphlet aroused came from its deliberate elimination of the usual elitist apparatus of persuasion and its acknowledged appeal to a wider reading public. Paine’s arguments are sometimes tortured, and the logic is often deficient. There are few of the traditional gentlemanly references to learned authorities...Paine scorned ‘words of sound’ that only ‘amuse the ear’ and relied on a simple and direct idiom; he used concrete, even coarse and vulgar, imagery drawn from the commonplace world that could be understood even by the unlearned.⁶⁹

In other words, Wood states here, Paine, as is common with revolutionaries in both America and beyond, rejected the formalities and costumes of politics and the written argument (this rejection

⁶⁸ Thomas Paine, "Common Sense" in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology* by Isaac Kramnick and Theodore J. Lowi.(New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 131.

⁶⁹ Gordon Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution" in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic* by Robert H. Horwitz (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), 117-8.

of formality would be reversed in some ways by the more elitist authors of the American Constitution and especially the *Federalist Papers*, which reject the revolutionary attitudes of the 1770s.

Since those republican revolutions of the late eighteenth century, moral sources of truth-telling for reformers and revolutionaries have appealed to universalist language about introspection and democratic equality to redress their lived experiences. Karl Marx is the most consequential example of this. Marshall Berman shows how Marx argued that the material misery of the proletariat can be transcended through Rousseauist politics. In reaction to modernity's "icy water of egoistical calculation,"

workers can come through the affliction and the fear only by making contact with the self's deepest resources...they will be prepared to fight for collective recognition of the self's beauty and value. Their communism, when it comes, will appear as a kind of transparent garment, at once keeping its wearers warm and setting off their naked beauty, so that they can recognize themselves and each other in all their radiance.⁷⁰

We can see further examples of authenticity at work in the emerging intellectual movements of Jacksonian America. The New England Transcendentalists attempted to radicalize education and social life in a way Rousseau would have admired. These reforms were in reaction to the rising liberal instrumentalism and the corrupting influence of commercial society on the self. In 1842, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody wrote "Plan of the West Roxbury Community" in *The Dial*, a Transcendentalist newsletter, which described the purposes of Brook Farm, a new experimental commune outside of Boston. She explained that the community allowed its members "leisure to live in all the faculties of the soul" rather than in the dictates of the marketplace. Amos Bronson

⁷⁰ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 110.

Alcott and other Transcendentalists sought to revolutionize childhood education based on the radical subjective principles one finds in Rousseau's *Emile*. According to Philip Gura,

[The Transcendentalists], excited by the idea that everyone, from birth, possessed a divine element, altered long-established pedagogy to cultivate this divine essence. They sought to replace Locke's influential psychological paradigm — which posits the mind of each child at birth as a tabula rasa, or a blank slate, upon which sensory experience writes its lessons — with the idealist notion that the mind has innate principles, including the religious sentiment, a view of education that requires a different pedagogy. The teacher has to help each child recognize and cultivate his internal principles. The classroom no longer was a place of rote learning, but an arena where even very young students were taught to cultivate heightened self-consciousness.⁷¹

Gura goes on to describe how the new classroom contained “movable desks so that the center of the room was open for group activities” and how Alcott “varied the day's work with nature walks, physical exercises, storytelling, and directed conversation.”⁷² Even at the university level this belief in the innate faculties of students held. Ralph Waldo Emerson gave a graduation speech that shocked the faculty of Harvard Divinity School (and had him banned for two decades) in which he proclaimed that

The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus; in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire.

Based on this tenant, he went on to rail against

[t]he stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by represent-

⁷¹ Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 159.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 84.

ing him as a man; indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology.⁷³

Those who wrote and argued authenticity made more direct political appeals in Jacksonian America. Another Transcendentalist fellow-traveller, Orestes Brownson, predating the *Communist Manifesto* by eight years, spoke from the perspective of the occluded in the emerging factories. He argued that if one looks at the world from the perspective of “the actual condition of the laboring classes, viewed simply and exclusively in their capacity as laborers, one would see “wage slavery” denied individuals their dignity and indeed, was even worse than chattel slavery.⁷⁴ Neo-feudalist, anti-democrats of the south like George Fitzhugh made similar arguments, but from the perspective of one who did not wish to undo the socially stratified nature of southern life.⁷⁵

The autobiographical writing of Frederick Douglass argues for emancipation from the perspective of a disenfranchised slave. Douglass describes in great detail his life as a slave.⁷⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton argues for constitutional rights for women from her own perspective of occlusion in the private domestic sphere. She injects the personal into the political by adopting the universalist, revolutionary rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence. In it, she lists the grievances she faces in her lived experience:

⁷³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address" in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 64.

⁷⁴ Orestes Augustus Brownson, *The Laboring Classes: An Article from the Boston Quarterly Review* (Boston: B.H. Greene, 1840).

⁷⁵ George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves without Masters* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁷⁶ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, ed. David W. Blight (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993).

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice. He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners. Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides. He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.⁷⁷

In another piece by Stanton, she, like Rousseau, argues for individual rights based on the modern reality of solitude in everyday life and the natural right to self-determination that governments must protect:

The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education, for the full development of her faculties, her forces of mind and body; for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear—is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life. The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; a place in the trades and professions, where she may earn her bread, is because of her birthright to self-sovereignty; because, as an individual, she must rely on herself. No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency, they must know something of the laws of navigation. To guide our own craft, we must be captain, pilot, engineer; with chart and compass to stand at the wheel; to watch the winds and waves, and know when to take in the sail, and to read the signs in the firmament over all. It matters not whether the solitary voyager is man or woman; nature, having endowed them equally, leaves them to their own skill and judgment in the hour of danger, and, if not equal to the occasion, alike they perish.⁷⁸

Since these budding social movements of the Jacksonian Era, the twentieth century yielded a number of authentic political actors, most notably activists in the Civil

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions” in *American Political Thought: A Norton Anthology* by Isaac Kramnick, and Theodore J. Lowi (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 530.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Solitude of Self*, (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2001), 7.

Rights and feminist movements. It also saw reactions to the spiritually-deadening and often oppressive mechanisms of modernity in which the self, while more materially comfortable, was corrupted and disoriented with anomie. The Frankfurt School produced a number of texts challenging the ideologies and practices of the late modern bourgeois public sphere that colonize the self and destroy individuality. Echoing Rousseau's *Letter to D'Almbert*, Horheimer and Adorno rail against the "culture industry" for transforming the potentially emancipatory practice of artistic expression into mere capitalist profit. The 1950s and 60s produced a number of screeds against the complacency and conformity of postwar America.

Did this radical retreat into the subjective realm destroy the public protections for individual freedom? Rousseau's coupling of radical subjectivism and radical communitarianism has had no shortage of critics. Railing against Rousseau and his adherents, a counterrevolutionary politics was expressed throughout the Enlightenment to the present time. As the intellectual father of the French Revolution, Rousseau's ideas of demasking society, creating transparency between persons and between societies and governments, and freeing human beings to be natural was seen as dangerous. While Edmund Burke supported the American Revolution, he despised the precepts of revolutionaries like Rousseau and Paine. He writes:

[Now] all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions that made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of lie are to be dissolved

by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off.⁷⁹

This counterrevolutionary pessimism about human nature figured heavily in the construction of the American Constitution. To the horror of many of the American Revolutionaries like Paine, *The Federalist Papers* openly and repeatedly express anxiety about transparency between citizens and between citizens and government. Madison makes the Burkean argument that democracy is dangerous:

Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths⁸⁰

In Federalist #55, Madison argues that when individuals unite for political purposes, even the wisest lose their ability to think independently: “In all very numerous assemblies, of whatever character composed, passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason. Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.” (#55). The solution for this camaraderie among the citizenry is found in Federalist #10, where Madison suggests that by creating a large commercial republic with many factions, citizens will remain opaque from one another:

Extend the sphere, and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other. Besides other impediments, it may be remarked that, where there is a consciousness of unjust or dishonorable purposes, communication is al-

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com, 2005), 42.

⁸⁰ James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. "Federalist 10" in *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 76.

ways checked by distrust in proportion to the number whose concurrence is necessary.⁸¹

More recently in scholarship on the role of the self in politics, George Kateb argues that Rousseau's direct democracy, far from promoting and protecting individual freedom, spells a great loss for individuality. Kateb believes that in the modern world, a moderate amount of groundlessness and anomie go hand in hand with individuality. This combination of groundlessness and individuality is best protected by a representative democracy that keeps a proper distance between citizens and between citizens and their government. As a proto-totalitarian community, Rousseau's direct democracy solves too many questions with too many simple answers. Rousseau's community is, Kateb notes, "small, simple, and static." There can be "no individuality." Rousseau's community is:

a great moral vision; but the loss to humanity, the loss in humanity, is unspeakably great. The raw materials of the modern self are removed from community. Not enough of its necessities are accommodated: distance between people...the sense that the world is a strange place. Moderate alienation and moderate anomie are extinguished. The preconditions of the dispositions sponsored by representative democracy are enfeebled. The Rousseauist community discourages independence of spirit and the sense of moral indeterminacy.⁸²

This lack of distance between citizens and their government in a direct democracy, Kateb argues, makes it more difficult for citizens to protest, since it makes "any impulse to dissent into an act of shameful rebellion against oneself."⁸³ Adding to the chorus of lamentations over transparent and direct democracy were writers of the twentieth century who saw in Rousseau the loss of in-

⁸¹ Ibid., 80.

⁸² George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 1992, 55.

⁸³ Ibid.

dividual freedom and at worse, full scale totalitarianism. Isaiah Berlin, in particular, argued that Rousseau “claims to have been the most ardent and passionate lover of human liberty whoever lived” but yet was “one of the most sinister and formidable enemies of liberty in the whole history of modern thought.”⁸⁴

We see then that from both intellectual and political corners, projects for democratic emancipation of the self and of private spaces in general have faced a backlash. Philosophically, the backlash is based on the belief that in order for representative democracy to thrive, there must be mechanisms that create buffers between citizens in their private spheres. This view tends to see politics as agonal, where public life is and ought to be an arena for performance over expression, opacity over transparency, and self-interest over public interest; we ought to wear masks in public rather than “be ourselves.” Politically from the anti-democratic right, elites have sought to prevent the personal from becoming political so that domination can continue unchecked in what are traditionally considered to be private spaces. Yet this permeability between private and public also alarms postmodern democrats on the left. This is the fear that the politicization of identity leads to the colonization of the self from elites. In the next chapter, I expand on the backlash against authenticity from the perspective of Hannah Arendt, whose political theory has been utilized philosophically and politically by both the right and the postmodern left as an alternative to the politics of authenticity.

Both sides of the ideological spectrum have railed against the excesses of authenticity in full force since the 1960s. At the same time, there have been few academic or political voices

⁸⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 52.

since then arguing for the idea that authenticity is even a worthy discourse to consider in addressing our social and political problems. Ironically, this is precisely because we are so inundated with claims of authenticity from advertising, political campaigns, and social media that we fail to notice it as a revolutionary idea. As Thomas Frank argues in *The Conquest of Cool*, late capitalism saw the complete co-opting of the discourse by the forces against which the discourse used to rail.⁸⁵ The popularization of Mao and Che Guavara t-shirts proves this (in an ironic counter-attack on communization of revolution, a popular t-shirt arose recently with a picture of Che with the text “I don’t actually know who this is”). Yet As I will argue later on, it is precisely in the moment when we are least aware of this co-opting and most subjected to the colonization of the self that the discourse (even if modified by some elements of performative politics) is most needed.

⁸⁵ Thomas Frank. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1997).

CHAPTER THREE: The Politics of Theatricality

Is meaningful, effective political action possible without an authentic identity recognized by oneself and others? After surveying the landscape of Rousseauist political action in the last chapter, we can determine that for Rousseau and those he influenced, the answer is no. The purposes of the authentic political life relate both to the integrity of the self and to justice in the political sphere. This leads to two types of “uncovering” that take place. Firstly, the inner self becomes more intimately apparent to others in the public realm and thus, public masks are uncovered. Secondly, the public itself unearths and rights moral wrongs that were heretofore hidden from public scrutiny. In these ways, Rousseau and the other romantic advocates of authenticity defend this politics for overcoming the loneliness, division, artificiality, and the subsequent social and political injustice that men and women experience in the modern world. Getting in touch with oneself leads to commiseration with others in a deeper, more present way and ultimately, to justice.

There is another politics that sees all this as conceptually and politically troubling. This is the politics of performativity. Critics of Rousseauist authenticity who embrace politics as performance include Edmund Burke, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. While these thinkers differ on their ideas about the public realm, they reject the idea of the centered interiority of the self as a stable source of political legitimacy, seeing the very idea of a “self” as a Rousseauist subject as fiction. The inner self for these thinkers is a mysterious existential realm that is never at rest nor unified, as it must be for Rousseau. Further, it is too evasive to be judged by, or projected into, the public without being filtered by a public mask. In

this chapter, we will explore this alternative vision of the self in politics and its influence in order to better understand the discourse on authenticity and why a modified, updated form of it is needed today more than ever.

The most systematic thinker of performative politics in the twentieth century is Hannah Arendt. Arendt was a German-born Jew who escaped the Holocaust and later, became controversial for her statements about the cause of it, some arguing that she gave a moral excuse to Eichmann and other Nazi officials. She sees the problems of mass society and twentieth century totalitarianism arising largely out of Rousseauist authenticity, its offshoots of intimacy and transparency among and between modern citizens, the authoritarian methods to achieve it, and an organic view of history that dangerously views these outcomes as inevitable. Like Rousseau, she laments the loss of self in modernity, but the categories of “self” and the purposes of politics in conditioning the self are quite different for her. She rejects the type of Rousseauist subjectivity that attempts to unify the self psychologically, apart from the community, and then to maintain that autonomy in one’s political experiences. Instead, she seeks to create a politics in which the public sphere is a space in which one can individuate oneself from others.

Philosophy and Politics

Arendt calls into question many assumptions of the Western metaphysical tradition from Plato onward. Politics was downgraded for Plato, Arendt argues, after the trial of Socrates in which his persuasion, “the highest, truly political art”, failed to convince the Athenian jury of his metaphysical truth. In response to the trial, Plato’s anti-Socratic, “furious denunciation of *doxa*...became one of the cornerstones of his concept of truth.” Rejecting *doxa* (“opinion”) as a

lower form of knowledge, Plato “yearn[ed] for absolute standards” which he then sought to introduce “into the realm of human affairs where, without such transcending standards, everything remains relative.” Not surprisingly, Plato’s later dialogue *Phaedo*, sought to compel his audience through myths about rewards and punishments in the afterlife rather than through the use of persuasive reason.⁸⁶ Plato’s “tyranny of truth” then attempted to take philosophy, which involved absolute, unchanging, and eternal standards and impose them on the relative, fluctuating, and temporal world of politics.⁸⁷

An analogous conflict is the tension, according to Arendt, between “two diametrically opposed ways of life — the life of the philosopher...and the way of life of the citizen.”⁸⁸ Harkening back to the allegory of the cave, the philosopher contemplates truth in solitude. The realm that the philosopher contemplates is the otherworldly realm of the forms. The real world, in which citizens live together, is merely representation of that otherworldly realm. Like Plato, Rousseau and his revolutionary brethren sought to collapse these categories of otherworldly and worldly, truth and politics, philosopher and citizen. Yet unlike for Plato and ancient and medieval metaphysicians, the modern depository of this truth was not a well-ordered cosmos but the individual human soul. Thus Rousseau and his followers endorsed the philosophical concept of the natural self who held the truth in one’s heart and then told the truth in the public realm.

Plato’s specific purpose of truth-telling, argues Mathew Sharpe, is much more spiritual and otherworldly than it is political and worldly. Sharpe details how truth-telling, in Michel

⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, “*Philosophy and Politics*,” *Social Research* 71:3 (2004), 427.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 431

⁸⁸ Hannah Arendt, “*Truth and Politics*” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

Foucault's reading of Plato, is not meant to persuade the many, but to elevate the soul of the addressee which, for Plato, ought to be "the prince or tyrant who, by learning to care for himself *only then* becomes capable of caring for others."⁸⁹ Sharpe makes a critical point about contemporary truth-telling: for most of the history of Western thought, the standards of empirical truth to which the mass public holds the rhetoric of our everyday public officials have been on the low end of the scale of what it means to possess knowledge or wisdom. Platonic truth is not the opposite of a lie about an empirical fact, but rather, the opposite of opinion, or *doxa*, as a general way of knowing. Plato scolds ignorance much more than intentional deception. Not surprisingly, it is quite difficult to find thinkers in the Western canon who defend or promote a specifically political form of *parrhesia*. Arendt claims that only with the rise of modern science and Protestantism did the intentionality of lying become a moral issue.⁹⁰ Here, we can see that personal responsibility for what one says is very much part of the modern discourse of the self. If one is ignorant of the truth, one cannot be held accountable for untrue statements one says. If one knows the truth and says otherwise, he or she is blameworthy. In both cases, intentionality is what is being judged.

We see here the tension between truth and politics: truth can be found through silent reflection and introspection of other-worldly ideas in solitude, yet putting a true idea into words before others instantly transforms it into mere opinion. As Arendt explains, philosophy always loses its truth upon its mixture with politics:

⁸⁹ Matthew Sharpe, "A Question of Two Truths? Remarks on Parrhesia and the 'Political-Philosophical' Difference," *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 90.

⁹⁰ Arendt "Truth and Politics," 549.

As soon as the philosopher submitted his truth, the reflection of the eternal, to the polis, it became immediately an opinion among opinions. It lost its distinguishing quality, for there is no visible hallmark that marks off truth from opinion. It is as though the moment the eternal is brought into the midst of men it becomes temporal, so that the very discussion of it with others already threatens the existence of the realm in which the lovers of wisdom move.⁹¹

Arendt is asserting an age-old conundrum: truth and politics do not exist in an organic relationship; one must be imposed on the other. If politics is prioritized in praxis, the purity of truth often becomes devalued, mocked, and often punished in the world of opinion (as Socrates experienced). If philosophy is prioritized, it is often imposed by an authoritarian “tyranny of truth”, as Arendt argued we see from Plato to Rousseau.⁹² When philosophy prevails, tyrannical regimes and subjective authenticity often become two sides of the same coin.

Privileging philosophy over truth has important implications for the role of the self in politics. For Arendt, there is a way in which philosophy’s victory over politics tends to come from one’s projection of one’s inner self onto the world; one remakes the world in his or her own image. The possessor of truth has a personal will to be alone, outside the plural world of politics, movement and action among others. If the conditions are ripe, tyranny becomes the result of these personal, yet metaphysical impulses. As Arendt argues:

Philosophers cannot be trusted with politics or political philosophy. Not only do they have one supreme interest which they seldom divulge — to be left alone, to have their solitude guaranteed and freed from all possible disturbances, such as the disturbance of the fulfillment of one’s duty as a citizen — but this interest has

⁹¹ Hannah Arendt, “Socrates” in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 12.

⁹² Arendt, “*Philosophy and Politics*,” 431.

naturally led them to sympathize with tyrannies where action is not expected of citizens.⁹³

Arendt's distaste for the privileging of philosophy puts her in company with anti-essentialist postmodern thinkers inspired by Nietzsche. In different ways, they see the demand for truth as a burden to politics, whether autocratic, democratic, or otherwise. Indeed, Nietzsche's own reflection on the philosophical mind led him to remark on the danger in linking personal visions of morality and the political realm:

Little by little I came to understand what every great philosophy to date has been: the personal confession of its author, a kind of unintended and unwitting memoir; and similarly, that the moral (or immoral) aims in every philosophy constituted the actual seed from which the whole plant invariably grew. Whenever explaining how a philosopher's most far-fetched metaphysical propositions have come about, in fact, one always does well to ask first: 'What morality is it (is *he*) aiming at?... every instinct is tyrannical; and as *such* seeks to philosophize.'⁹⁴

Thus in different ways, both Arendt and Nietzsche react to this personal-political mixture by endorsing a hyper-politicized agon. This agonistic politics promotes political freedom by stifling truth regimes and the personal resentments of the philosophers from which they spring.

For Arendt, being-in-the-world (rather than outside of it) is a way to recapture politics. It involves a complex theory involving dualistic thinking in solitude and masked public action that reject the absolute metaphysical adherence to truth that Plato, and later Rousseau, injected into politics. Before outlining these, it is necessary to detail those modern anti-political, anti-

⁹³ Hannah Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism" in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2005), 360.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Marion Faber. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 8-9.

democratic developments to which Arendt is responding: the rise of “the social” and the emergence of totalitarianism.

The Rise of the Social and Totalitarianism

The social, for Arendt, is a new category in modernity. In this new realm of “society,” what had always been considered to be outside of the public sphere, whether hidden away in the private household or the human heart, became subject to governmental administration and public judgment. Arendt details the injection of household items into the public realm:

[W]ith the rise of society, that is, the rise of the “household” (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a “collective” concern.⁹⁵

Economics became increasingly handled by a “nation-wide administration of housekeeping”⁹⁶, governed by “bureaucracy, the rule of nobody.”⁹⁷

The rise of the social gave us the complete opposite of the ideal of heroic individuation Arendt admires from ancient Greek citizenship. In the Greek world,

the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely atonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all. The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality; it was the place where men could show who they really and inexchangably were.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958), 33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

The rise of the social, by contrast, created an “automatism in human affairs” eradicating the space for individuation⁹⁹ or, as Arendt also refers to it, “disclosure” of the self.¹⁰⁰ As the public sphere was lost, so to was the potential for the crucial *movement* from private to public that was the hallmark of excellence in Greek society. There existed no space between private and public over which the heroic individual could leap into action to perform excellent deeds. With the rise of the social, we saw “the disappearance of the gulf that the ancients had to cross daily to transcend the narrow realm of the household and ‘rise’ into the realm of politics.”¹⁰¹ Hence for Arendt, the loss of the public sphere went hand in hand with the loss of a heroic individuality in which one could individuate oneself from others.

Yet even more boundless and murky than the politicization of housekeeping was the politicization of Rousseau’s *sentiment interieur*, a completely new conceptual realm of individual psychology in modernity:

The first articulate explorer and to an extent even theorist of intimacy was Jean-Jacques Rousseau...He arrived at his discovery through a rebellion not against the oppression of the state but against society’s unbearable perversion of the human heart, its intrusion upon an innermost region in which man until then had needed no special protection. The intimacy of the human heart, unlike the private household, has no objective tangible place in the world, nor can the society against which it protests and asserts itself be localized with the same certainty as the public space. To Rousseau, both the intimate and the social were, rather, subjective modes of human existence...The modern individual and his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, his ever-changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life, was born in this rebellion of the heart.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 179.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 33.

¹⁰² Ibid. 38-39.

As Arendt reads it, alienation meant that the *sentiment interieur* lacked any solid grounding in either personal or public existence. His radical subjectivism attempted to locate it by collapsing these spaces. But in doing this, he further alienated individuals by robbing them both of an inner self and of a public self.

The French Revolution

Politically, for Arendt, the French Revolution was the first moment in which the rise of the social and its constituent parts of authenticity, intimacy, and compassion were on display. As a modern, fiercely secular phenomenon, the Revolution placed the depository of truth within the heart individual rather than in the cosmos or the heavens. As she tells it, political delegitimization under this new politics was earned not through ignorance of the external cosmic order, as it had been for Plato, but willful hypocrisy from within. The collectivist, revolutionary project of the Jacobins was to create transparency between the inner motives of the individual will and what the public saw and judged, so that the cardinal sin of hypocrisy could be checked and disciplined. In doing this, the Revolution had to freeze the fluctuation and plurality of politics and the inner plurality that was conditioned by it. They thus demanded that the individual's will to tell the truth become the *sine qua non* of politics. The Rousseauist universalization of "man" then collectivized this demand on the individual. As Arendt notes, "the very attraction of Rousseau's theory for the men of the French Revolution was that he apparently had found a highly ingenious means to put a multitude into the place of a single

person; for the general will was nothing more or less than what bound the many into one.”¹⁰³

According to Dana Villa, Arendt shows how after reducing the collectivity to one, the revolutionary project of making a transparent society could begin: “manifest in Rousseau’s theory and Robespierre’s practice was a cult of the ‘natural’ man, of the authentic or roleless individual, coupled with a ruthless politics of unmasking.”¹⁰⁴

For Rousseau, the public presentation of authentic, inborn compassion of this roleless individual is supposed to lessen one’s reliance on others, avoid self-alienation, and thus maintain one’s individual freedom. However, the politics that results from Rousseau’s theory, argues Arendt, becomes not a public celebration of the unique authenticity of each individual but the forced requirement that each must act *as if* one is acting sincerely from within. Once the “war upon hypocrisy” is put into revolutionary practice by Robespierre, “public words and deeds are seen as either self-serving (and therefore false) or the expression of the actor’s ‘true’ authentic self.”¹⁰⁵ Only the appearance of the latter guarantees one a legitimate place in the polity while the former invites paranoia and violence toward the individual. Lionel Trilling notes that for Arendt, French revolutionaries grew paranoid over the “hypocrisy of the individual” and “the troubled ambiguity of the personal life, the darkness of man’s unknowable heart.” This paranoia forces individuals to conform to a widespread fealty to revolutionary ideals regardless of dictates

¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 67.

¹⁰⁴ Dana Richard Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 138.

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 96.

of their inner selves, since “what was private and unknown might be presumed to be subversive of the public good.”¹⁰⁶

Compassion

A further element of the politics of authenticity that accompanied the rise of the social was the natural human trait of compassion. Compassion became equated with citizen virtue and it served many purposes. Firstly, for Rousseau specifically, it served as an existential antidote to the condition of loneliness in modernity. The maelstrom of bourgeois urban bourgeois life that Rousseau experienced, in which he saw modern men and women perform roles for each other in a public competition, led him to remark “I am never more lonely than when I’m in the crowd.”¹⁰⁷ He could not see behind the costumes and into the beings of the bustling city-dwellers around him, and he conjectured their pretended manners were mere playacting while they secretly plotted against their opponents. Secondly and relatedly, compassion served as a social glue that allowed individuals to remain authentic while commiserating with others in a tightly knit community. Lastly, compassion was the French Revolution’s reaction against the poverty that resulted from such a competitive society. The “heartlessness of reason” that characterized salon life and the “glaring indifference towards the suffering [of others]” among elites led Rousseau and later Robespierre to elevate the poor to high moral ground.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 69-70.

¹⁰⁷ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 115.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 88.

For Arendt, the politicizing of compassion is devious. It is the fuel that fires the paranoid desire to unmask public actors and steer them in the direction of utopian political projects.

George Kateb notes:

Arendt finds in the sense of suffering, in compassion and pity, the trigger for further extremisms of response, including the implacable urge to unmask the hypocrisy (real or imputed or imagined) of all those whose position in life automatically makes them suspect. They may be hiding something, some hostility to the Revolution, some resistance to the needs of the people, some incapacity to really feel the sufferings of others as though their own, some silent treason of the heart.¹⁰⁹

Arendt argues that the role of compassion in the French Revolution was destructive of political freedom for two further reasons. Firstly, by praising the suffering of the poor, argues Arendt, it served as a pretext for Robespierre's "lust for power."¹¹⁰ Here we can see that compassion and power do not mix well. As Margaret Canovan notes, Arendt does not deny the goodness of compassion; she only insists that it can turn into a "disguise for power-seeking" once it is taken out of "the sphere of direct, face-to-face personal relationships and becomes entangled with politics."¹¹¹ Secondly, beyond Robespierre's ambition, compassion destroys the essential space between individuals that is necessary for the painstaking work of politics and replaces it with mob rule and violence. Arendt notes:

Because compassion abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where politics matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located...politically speaking, irrelevant and without consequence...As a rule, it is not compassion which sets out to change worldly conditions in order to ease human suffering, but

¹⁰⁹ Kateb, George, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 93-94.

¹¹⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 79.

¹¹¹ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge England: Cambridge UP, 1992), 170.

if it does, it will shun drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise, which are the processes of law and politics, and lend its voice to the suffering itself, which must claim for swift, and direct action, that is for action with the means of violence.¹¹²

Rousseau's *Emile* shows us how compassion would keep the self intact while acting as a communitarian adhesive that would overcome alienation of the self from others. For Arendt, rather than maintaining the self and community, it fuels rage and prevents rational deliberation, destroying both the self and the community. Certainly there are many examples showing the power of rage to destroy deliberative politics both throughout history and in contemporary politics. We must, however, consider whether political agency, even to engage in procedural politics, is at all possible without the injection of emotions like compassion and even, sometimes, rage, into the public sphere. This is a question to which we will return.

Mass Culture

For Arendt, the politics of authenticity clearly facilitated The Terror by collapsing the public and private spheres, creating the social, or what Hanna Pitkin calls "the blob."¹¹³ This set the stage for the emergence of "the mass." Twentieth century technological advances and population growth created the conditions under which this monster could release a venom containing even more systemic apolitical thoughtlessness, and violence. The mass became both victim and embodiment of this creature. It was a new form of social organization in modernity

¹¹² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 76-77.

¹¹³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1998).

characterized by large numbers of people who share little in common except widespread political indifference:

Masses are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness... The term masses applies only where we deal with people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations or trade unions. Potentially they exist in every country and form the majority of those large numbers of neutral, politically indifferent people who never join a party and hardly ever go to the polls.¹¹⁴

The modern individual, who had already lost the public world through the earlier rise of the social, became the lonely (even while in a crowd), confused figure of “mass man.” He is characterized by

his loneliness — and loneliness is neither isolation nor solitude — regardless of his adaptability; his excitability and lack of standards; his capacity for consumption, accompanied by inability to judge, or even to distinguish; above all, his egocentricity...¹¹⁵

In every way, mass man fails to live up to the ideal citizen of the ancient Greek world. The Greek citizen created works of art that would individuate oneself in public and that would then last beyond one’s life, solidifying one’s immortality in the *polis*. By contrast, mass man *consumes* fleeting cultural objects. Mass society, says Arendt, “wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just like any other consumer goods.”¹¹⁶ Not long before this, Horkheimer and Adorno

¹¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 311.

¹¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 199.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

had similarly equated the lack of an individuating politics with the homogenizing power of mass cultural consumption:

The relentless unity of the culture industry bears witness to the emergent unity of politics. Sharp distinctions like those between A and B films, or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated.¹¹⁷

This lack of escape from the all-encompassing power of capital to shape thoughts and behaviors was a common anxiety among Neo-Marxist theorists of the twentieth century. But unlike for Marx — and his revolutionary predecessor Rousseau — Arendt claimed that the malaise of mass man was conditioned not by a lack of class- or self-consciousness, nor primarily from the power of capital, but on the absence of worldliness. As she argues, our “alienation from the world” is something that “since Rousseau [has been] mistaken for self-alienation.”¹¹⁸ We see here that it was not the absence of a stable inner self that led to this condition, but the lack of a stable public sphere.

Totalitarianism

World-alienation was taken to its extreme in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Under totalitarianism, individuals experience the complete reality of otherworldly ideas, so that individuals’ ability to entertain contradictory ideas (i.e. to “think”) about moral issues is greatly inhibited. For Arendt, the long-term rejection of politics in the West by metaphysicians from

¹¹⁷Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 97.

¹¹⁸Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 199.

Plato to Rousseau, along with the modern psychology of mass man, created ripe conditions for this radical escape from politics and the emergence of tyrannies of truth. Totalitarianism signals the complete eradication of the public sphere of action and by extension, the complete eradication of the private sphere of individual thought. It unifies and then subsumes the will of individuals into collectivist, national projects, the ends of which are seen as inevitable. Similar to the logic of the platonic forms, totalitarian ideology, as Dana Villa explains, gives a “total explanation” for the “inner logic” that is working behind “multifarious appearances” so that these ideologues are “emancipate[d]...from experience.”¹¹⁹

Totalitarianism starts at the level of individual psychology. Modern fluctuation and rapid movement in public lead to the absence of a stable identity in the individual that Rousseauist romantics seek to fill. Yet for Arendt, without a public sphere, identity cannot be formed by individuating oneself among others in the agon. Thus totalitarian government for Arendt, as Thomas Dumm notes, “relies upon the extraordinary condition of stillness to control those who live under its rule.”¹²⁰ Arendt characterizes totalitarian government as “the iron band of terror” which will impose this stillness by “destroy[ing] the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.”¹²¹ The state bureaucracy fills this identity vacuum with its own authoritarian vision of citizenship. Norma Morruzi discusses the apolitical, yet identity-granting nature of the totalitarian state according to Arendt:

¹¹⁹ Dana Richard Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 92.

¹²⁰ Dumm *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 37.

¹²¹ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 466.

The organization of the masses into a totalitarian movement is not the same as their politicization; mass movements are not social movements. Mass support of totalitarianism does not involve the broadening of political self-representation. Rather, it organizes the masses into a movement in which membership and opposition are defined by category rather than action, and identity is essentialized rather than achieved.¹²²

Totalitarianism not only destroys the experience of living in space, but the experience of living in time. Without the experience of temporality, in which the world around us changes, new ideas cannot be born beyond the ones that the political regimes introduce as the unchangeable and ultimate goals of political society. This importance of spontaneity to political life can best be captured in Arendt's concept of natality:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born.¹²³

The logic of totalitarianism eviscerated possibilities for birth or rebirth of both political ideas and personal remaking. Stemming from Rousseauist revolutionary practice was the guarantee of the inevitable dialectic of history in which individual freedom would be reconciled with communitarian justice if citizens were educated accordingly. If the script of history had already been written and dictated by the totalitarian government which controlled individual and collective wills, then spontaneous action was impossible. The government then "makes out of many the One who unfailingly will act as though he himself were part of the course of history or nature, a device that has been found not only to liberate historical and natural forces, but to

¹²² Norma Claire Moruzzi. *Speaking through the Mask: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Social Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000), 122.

¹²³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

accelerate them to a speed they never would reach if left to themselves.”¹²⁴ Thus with space, time, and identity frozen in place, the fluctuations of politics came to an end in modernity.

Loneliness and Madness

Life went on for totalitarianism’s prisoners, but not the freedom that makes politics possible. Within this frozen, apolitical state, widespread existential loneliness anchors the individual. Arendt’s definition and description of “loneliness” is not conventional. It is different from what has always been thought of as mere “isolation.” Past tyrannies, Arendt argues, had isolated individuals from each other so that it was difficult for them to act in concert. For Arendt, the experience of loneliness is not a physical separation from other individuals, but a psychic separation from what Arendt’s specific concept that she calls “world”, in which citizens can fluctuate: sometimes agreeing and coalescing with others, sometimes disagreeing with and battling others through legal means, so that the outcomes of political action are always left uncertain. In this way, loneliness can be thought of as “groundlessness” or “disorientation” in which while there is transparency between individuals and between individuals and government, there is no way to test, workshop, float ideas in a shared public space, since all think the same about politics (or at least, are barred from saying otherwise). Held deep in one’s psyche, loneliness is the experience of “not belonging to the world at all.” Individuals are alienated from free, public spaces for debate, and by extension, from their own selfhood which, as the earlier pre-totalitarian romantic thinkers got wrong, cannot be achieved by further retreat into the self, but needs that free public space. To fill this void of existence, totalitarian government creates

¹²⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 466.

what Thomas Dumm calls the “One Man...writ large, a leviathan of loneliness.”¹²⁵ Through their tacit consent, modern men and women trade in the atomism of modern solitude for this new and far more extreme atomism. What led to totalitarianism was this sense of loneliness whereby the individual descends into a kind of existential madness; a detachment from reality that Arendt describes with the phrase: “when I am by myself, I am deserted by my own self.” Having latched on to ideology, one loses both the pre-political capacity to think for and by oneself and thus the political capacity to act among others: “totalitarian logic destroys man’s capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action.” Without the possibility of ideological fluctuation in a shared public space (i.e. plurality), one has no way of even confirming one’s own existence. One’s thoughts and senses have no way of being verified by the “common sense” of others that exist in a plural world. If everybody thinks exactly the same about the function of politics (the end of racial struggle for the Nazis and the end of class struggle for the Soviets), one’s unique ideas, reached through inner dialogue, are never confirmed by others, leaving the individual “lonely.” This is the extreme and ongoing dread of Cartesian doubt:

Even the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our *common sense* which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous. Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can we trust our immediate sensual experience.¹²⁶

George Kateb emphasizes the existential importance of knowing that one is known by others:

¹²⁵ Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 36.

¹²⁶ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 475-6.

Life's burden can be better borne — indeed, one can become reconciled to one's existence — not if one knows who one is (no one can know himself), but if one is known by others as he knows them, and know not as cultivators of the inner life define knowing, but as the great poets and dramatists exemplify knowing, through creative or mimetic power. Each knows that he is known, and knows others. This is knowing in a special sense — knowing as recognition, not as propositional knowledge. For this knowing and being known to be possible, there must be a public realm in which men are expected to act, and do act, by word and deed.¹²⁷

In loneliness we exist, for Arendt, not in the common world, but in our own worlds, even while surrounded by others. To view this through an Aristotelian lens, we cannot achieve our humanity, which is only realized when we are acting *politically* with others (with all the fluctuation in ideas and arguments within and between individuals that that entails). Without this sense, we are left lonely, without meaningful human contact.

Knowing that one is known, and knowing others, for Arendt, requires the ability to *think* of the world in all its fluctuation, otherness, and plurality. But we can know only masks, we cannot know the hidden, abstract “self” or “soul” that is underneath the masks of others in public life. The mystery that lies behind the mask is not something we could or should attempt to understand completely. As Kateb — an adherent to the Arendtian distrust of authenticity — notes, only when we can think of the world as a “strange place”, in which we resist the desire to aim our judgment at the mysterious and unknowable inner lives of others, can we achieve a healthy “moral indeterminacy” rather than “the Rousseauist community” which “discourages independence of spirit.”¹²⁸ Under totalitarian rule, however, the world is not “a strange place”, it is all too knowable, transparent, and un-strange. Everyone ought to know what everyone else is

¹²⁷ Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, 8.

¹²⁸ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 54.

thinking at all times. Therefore, there is no need (or ability) to “think”, in the sense of considering conflicting inner thoughts and the conflicting arguments of others in a world of uncertainty. Roger Berkowitz argues that for Arendt, “the bond between totalitarianism and loneliness is the phenomenon of thoughtlessness.”¹²⁹ This bond is most controversial in *Eichmann In Jerusalem*. In a totalitarian world devoid of the fluctuation of politics, both bureaucrats and average men and women speak only of metaphysical, otherworldly, and spaceless, timeless “truths” that have been propagandized into easy cliches making up “officialese.” Berkowitz notes that Arendt’s Eichmann showed through his “impenetrable fortress of cliches [that] he feared, above all, to live alone, without orders and directives, cut off from an organization or group that would give his life direction and meaning.”¹³⁰ In Arendt’s famous concept of “the banality of evil”, Arendt hopes to return us to a pre-modern conception of judgment, in which it ought not to be assumed that evil acts are performed from the inner will of the actor. Rather, they are the result of the inability to think independently apart from the mass.

Thinking in Solitude

Mass society and totalitarianism indicate the absence of modern politics. How does Arendt argue we can recover it? The answer involves her prescriptions for a personal, existential escape from totalitarian mentality and affirmative reengagement of the costumed self with the world. In this formulation, we see three psychological correctives to the totalitarian personality

¹²⁹ Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz and Thomas Keenan, *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Fordham UP, 2010), 237.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

that spring from the individual: thinking instead of thoughtlessness, solitude instead of loneliness, and *doing* into a common world instead of *being* in one's own world.

Roger Berkowitz claims that the private act of thinking in solitude is a seldom-acknowledged element of Arendt's thought. Yet it is a necessary condition for the repoliticization of the public realm.¹³¹ The private act of thinking, argues Arendt, is much more difficult than it seems when one considers that there are no longer traditional standards for thinking or acting in modernity:

The trouble...is that we seem to be neither equipped nor prepared for this activity of thinking, of settling down in the gap between past and future. For very long times in our history...this gap was bridged over by what, since the romans, we have called tradition. That this tradition has worn thinner as the modern age progressed is a secret to nobody.¹³²

Without tradition, we are no longer using the past as a guide in our actions. Yet we cannot rely on the prescription of the Rousseauists on the use of the will, since it acts into the future; it is a dangerous tool totalitarian governments employ to ensure mass obedience toward an inevitable end of history. The will as it is conceived by the Rousseauists, therefore ought to be omitted from attempts to repoliticize the world. Yet while dismissing the will, Arendt does not dismiss the modern focus on the contents of the inner self. But our point of departure towards repoliticizing the world must spring from the individual in a way that decenters the unitary self (along with its will and its radical subjectivity) while giving this decentered self a path toward public action.

¹³¹ Ibid., 239.

¹³² Arendt, *Between past and Future*, 13-14.

To understand Arendtian thinking in the modern world, we must conceive the distance from one's fellow citizens where thinking takes place. Like for those who have urged the contemplative life throughout the history of philosophy, Arendtian thinking, according to Berkowitz, "requires a separation from the world, a passion for truth, and a willingness to let go of the affairs of the world. In the name of and out of care for the world, thinking requires a distance from the world." Yet we must take care not to stand completely apart from others. As Berkowitz notes, "[t]hinking is a difficult business" which requires one "[t]o stand apart from the public [without] stand[ing] alone."¹³³ This distance from the world is not an escape from it. Unlike for contemplative philosophers and prophets, who sought truth by abandoning others (and their opinions), Arendtian thinking requires the ability to represent others in one's thoughts.

This representation, for Arendt, takes place in the state of what she calls "solitude." Loneliness, on the other hand, is the complete abandonment from others. She draws the distinction between the two by explaining that solitude is the condition of having a split self in which others are represented whereas loneliness is the condition of having a unitary self in which one feels deserted by the world completely:

Loneliness is not solitude. Solitude requires being alone whereas loneliness shows itself most sharply in company with others...The solitary man...is alone and therefore can 'be together with himself'...In solitude, in other words, I am 'by myself,' together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others. All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought. The problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be

¹³³ Berkowitz, *Thinking in Dark Times*, 244.

mistaken for that of any other. For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people.¹³⁴

This “two-in-one” conception of the self later informs Arendt’s essay “Socrates” in which she expounds on the philosopher’s conception of the dualistic nature of the inner self and its relationship to political speech-acts in the public realm. Paraphrasing Socrates, she says that “living together with others begins with living together with oneself.” This “beginning” in solitude is not a sheltering of the self from the plural world of others, as it was for Rousseau’s *Emile*; instead, it maintains an attention to the audience of one’s speech-acts. For Arendt’s Socrates, to be “with his other self” means to “interrupt the individual’s sovereign and unitary self [by] internaliz[ing] the audience.” By thinking, one is “reproducing the relationship between “agent and onlooker” within “the same self person,”¹³⁵

In this way, Arendt’s conception of thinking counters Rousseau’s goal that the self become “truly one” after developing one’s selfhood in complete isolation from others. Thinking is possible for Arendt in a way it cannot be for Rousseau, because as she argues, the nature of the inner self is conditioned by the fluctuation and plurality of others, both in their physical proximity and in their mental representations in the mind of the thinker. Arendt’s conception of the private self exists, as Margaret Canovan argues, in an “endless dialogue”¹³⁶ with itself that ought not be subject to coercion or moral judgment from others, but always acknowledges their existence. This inner plurality extends to the plurality of the world. Politics reflects a world of

¹³⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 476.

¹³⁵ Arendt, “Socrates,” 21.

¹³⁶ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 170.

fluctuation in time and space, not stillness; as she argues, “men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”¹³⁷ Thus while in the mind of the speaker, officialese requires an ideology that escapes the fluctuations of time and space, thinking requires an audience that is firmly rooted in this world.

The Performative Self

In thinking, Arendt seeks to maintain a division between the private and the public realm while we represent others in thought. In this conception, there is a “pathos of distance” that Arendt shares with Nietzsche¹³⁸ that is maintained so that one has the space to think. But thinking alone cannot recover politics. If we wish to see the repoliticization of the world, thinking for Arendt is only one’s preparation for a common world in which men and women can live among each other in public and distinguish themselves “as distinct and unique persons” through action.¹³⁹ To prevent the madness of self-abandonment in totalitarian loneliness, one needs not merely to represent others in thought, but to be among others in order to gain the “common sense” necessary to confirm one’s existence as an individual. As Arendt says, “[t]he problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other.” If

¹³⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

¹³⁸ While Nietzsche’s “pathos of distance” tends to reject egalitarian democracy and romanticizes a society based on rank, Arendt more readily accepts democracy’s leveling effects. What they share in their reverence for a “pathos of distance” is distance per se between citizens, not difference in rank.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

individuals remain in solitude without “being seen and heard by others...it is as though [they] did not exist.”¹⁴⁰

Arendt’s division of the self into private and public is not just for the sake of protecting thinking, but to endorse public action. Yet while engaged in public action, we maintain our privacy by showing other people a public costume instead of our inner selves. George Kateb notes that this does not mean that citizens do not communicate or appear to each other in Arendtian politics, only that they do so impersonally, from a certain distance, as performers playing roles, rather than truth-tellers exposing their natural moral sentiments of compassion and pity from within:

The heart is a dark place, Arendt says more than once, and light cannot be thrown on it. What appears — the words and deeds of political actors — is necessarily impersonal, even though it is revelatory of something distinctive about each of the actors, just as a writer’s style is no outpouring of his heart but is nevertheless indicative of something indicative about him.¹⁴¹

This “something distinctive” is revealed in a filtered form through the public mask that Rousseau and other modern romantics despised. For Arendt, however, it is the part of the self that should appear in public, and must always straddle the line between revealing the public self but shielding the private self. Between the two dimensions of private and public, the mask or *persona*—which the politics of authenticity had stripped away—serves as a buffer.

Metaphorically, for Arendt, the mask or *persona* in the ancient world “had two functions: it had to hide, or rather to replace, the actor’s own face and countenance, but in a way that would make

¹⁴⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

¹⁴¹ Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, 94.

¹⁴² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 97.

it possible for the voice to sound through.”¹⁴² The mask thus endorses public action while protecting private thought.

The mask allows one to act heroically into public life. Unlike the nonpolitical Rousseauist virtues of love, compassion, and pity, which are supposed to connect people in transparent (and dangerous) ways, Arendt’s “action” argues Kateb, “not only connects people, it connects people in a way that also keeps them distinct, separate.”¹⁴³ Following ancient Greek conceptions of citizenship, the mask serves as a springboard, allowing the individual to overcome oneself by leaping heroically from the private realm into the public realm. The public actor individuates and differentiates oneself among others through acts and deeds in a competitive agonistic public sphere.

At other times in Arendt’s writings, the mask serves not as a springboard for heroicism, but for a democratic, associational model of performative public action. Rather than competing against one another in the agon, this model emphasizes a politics in which masked citizens act in concert with the shared, externalized common identities of others. The associational model assumes intersubjective communication of public actors as equals in their political (but not personal) identities. Thus, in addition to its protective and communicative powers, the mask, “affixed to the actor’s face by the exigencies of the play” also gave its wearer legal status as an equal citizen among other citizens that the Reign of Terror stripped away in order to reveal the role-less individual.¹⁴⁴ Under this associational model, with the private self protectively hidden behind the public mask, judgment of public acts would be diverted “away from what goes on

¹⁴³ Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 3.

inside the individual soul” and focus instead on “what happens outside and between individuals: institutions rather than will, actions rather than motives.”¹⁴⁵ With the mask, internalized private thinking could be protected from external indoctrination while the externalized persona could perform acts among others. This mode of citizenship differs from the one advocated by Rousseau, who attempted to create an ideal self with no distinction between his or her private and public roles.

In both the heroic-agonistic and associational-democratic models, the inner self is hidden. While the two-in-one of thinking prepares the self to live and act with others, only the outward acts that spring from such an internal dialogue are considered “political.” Because politics for Arendt is something that happens “between men and so quite outside of men” rather than within them, one’s political acts need to appear to others in the world that one shares in common with others.¹⁴⁶ She says that all objects upon which public deliberation can take place must “be seen and heard by everybody” in this space of appearance.¹⁴⁷ This means that such hidden, non-visible, and thus non-common private motives for action, such as a Rousseauist notion of “conscience,” ought not to be considered properly political.¹⁴⁸ What is common to both — and what differentiates each from Rousseauist authenticity — is the *impersonality* of action and thus, of politics.

Just as we can see Arendtian thinking as a preparation for this type of action, political theorist Brent Steele presents a similar view, arguing:

¹⁴⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 183.

¹⁴⁶ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 476.

¹⁴⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 97.

The social reality of the performance suggests that it makes little sense to speak about intentionality as an inner-state or interiority if humans are constantly preparing for performances. The metaphor of the ‘stage’ means that we’re never truly authentic, that we’re always putting on a show — or at least internalize the presence of an audience into our own calculations and commitments. Further, actors can engage in multiple roles to multiple audiences...the performance itself may determine these multiple roles, but so do the expectations of the audience.¹⁴⁹

We can see how this exterior presentation to the world was an accepted and expected means of communication before mass society. In his essay *Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution*, Gordon Wood describes how Revolutionary Era rhetoric in American generally was

designed by the speaker not as an expression of his personal emotions but as a calculated attempt to arouse the emotions of his listeners. Rhetoric was the art of relating what was said and how it was said to the needs and requirements of the audience. Since the speaker or the writer aimed above all to make a point and sway his public, rhetoric was necessarily less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the means of communicating a message.¹⁵⁰

But this type of communication has since dwindled, according to Wood: “Rhetoric today no longer means what it meant for the eighteenth century. To us rhetoric suggests at best elocution, or at worst some sort of disingenuous pleading, hyperbolic bombast lacking the sincerity and authenticity of self-expression that we have come to value to highly.”¹⁵¹

William James strikes a similar chord as far back as 1890, before the proliferation of postmodern thought, in his thoughts on the inner and outer multiplicity of the self:

Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind...he generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups...from this results what practically is a division of the man into several selves; and this may be a

¹⁴⁹ Brent J. Steele, *Alternative Accountabilities in Global Politics: The Scars of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2013), 79.

¹⁵⁰ Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution," 118-9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

discordant splitting, as where one is afraid to let one set of his acquaintances know him as he is elsewhere; or it may be a perfectly harmonious division of labor, as where one tender to his children is stern to the soldiers or prisoners under his command.¹⁵²

In Arendt, Steele and James, we see a focus on the internalization of the audience and then the capacity to performing many selves in different contexts. In these theories, not only is the outer world plural, but contra Rousseau's ideal, so too is the interiority of the self. Of great importance for both Arendt and Steele is the space from which one prepares for performance. On sociologist Erving Goffman's thoughts on the "back regions" from which performance is planned, Stelle writes:

Goffman's [theory is about] radical exteriority in this sense — because even in these 'back regions' where we are separated from an audience, we are still preparing for the show, still practicing the moment we go back on stage, and still coordinating our activities with others to affect, shape, and influence how we *will appear* in our performance. Intentionality is never subjective, then. It is intersubjective with those whom the actor must coordinate, and strategically presented towards the interlocutor who receives the act's performance. All those caught up in the performance — the actors and the audience — recognize it as a 'ceremony — as an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community.'¹⁵³

Goffman's "back regions" from which we are preparing for a performance for others is analogous to the private space for thinking that Arendt conceived. Movement from this space onto the stage of public life, and then movement upon that stage is, for theorists of performativity, the essence of political freedom. The most important difference within performative politics that contrasts it with Rousseauist authenticity is that the presence of diverse audiences in one's thought liberates the self rather than alienating it, conditioning it to adopt

¹⁵² William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U, 1981), 294.

¹⁵³ Steele, *Alternative Accountabilities in Global Politics*, 97.

different personas. All the while behind the public mask, whether before or during an action, we are aware of the others around us and thus no longer subjected to the otherworldly dimensions of madness and loneliness.

Political Implications

Arendtian performativity chastens the tradition of prophetic truth-telling from Plato to Luther to Rousseau in which truth is discovered outside of the public space of appearance and then imposed on the world. Arendtian politics prescribes that public speakers no longer testify to the other-worldly truth they have discovered behind the corrupting fluctuations of politics, but that they engage in politics on the ground among the fluctuations. The self is depersonalized, action is based on external principles rather than inner feelings, and judgment is aimed not at actors, but actions.

With this dismissal of moral prophesy in mind, we must ask if it is possible for Arendtian political actors to act in ways that overcome alienation while creating paths toward justice in the modern world. Can we achieve these goals by speaking through masks, whether to each other or to power structures? Or, when we no longer speak truth directly to power, do we lose our selves and do we become ineffectual when it comes to changing the world for the better? In the last chapter, I discussed movements for social justice throughout the Jacksonian period and into the twentieth century that were part of the legacy of the Left in America, and were based on the Rousseauist fusion of personal and political. Yet there are elements of the democratic Left that embrace an Arendtian theory of action. I wish to outline some of these elements, each of which allows us to consider different parts of the Arendtian political framework in the dual goal of

achieving a more just society while overcoming the sources of personal, existential malaise individuals face in modernity.

Bonnie Honig differentiates between what she calls “virtue theorists” like Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, and Michael Sandel (we might include Rousseau in this group as well) and “virtu theorists” like Nietzsche, Machiavelli, and Arendt. Honig’s critique of virtue theorists is that in attempting to overcome the alienation and contestation inherent in politics, they end up closing politics:

Virtue theorists of politics assume that the world and the self are not resistant to, but only enabled and completed by, their favored conceptions of order and subjectivity. This assumption undergirds their belief that modern disenchantment, alienation, pain, and cruelty would be diminished if only we adopted their principles of right, established just institutions whose fairness is ascertainable from a particular (rational) perspective, or yielded to the truth of membership in a wider community of meaning and value. In short, each of the virtue theorists... believes, mistakenly, that his own theory soothes or resolves the dissonances other theories cause. Each yearns for closure and each looks to politics, rightly understood, to provide and maintain it.¹⁵⁴

In trying to end political contestation, virtue theorists “remove politics from the reach of democratic contest.” This creates an excluded class that Honig calls “remainders.” They are “depoliticized...dehumanized, criminalized, or ostracized by an (otherwise inclusive) political community.”¹⁵⁵ Remainders, Arendt might argue, are the persecuted “hypocrites” of the Reign of Terror who did not adhere to the truth-telling standard of the revolutionary doctrinaires.

Virtu theorists on the other hand, according to Honig, provide an alternative agonism that critiques this closing of politics: “agonistic conflict is celebrated and the identification or conflation of politics with administration is charged with closing down the agon or with

¹⁵⁴ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), 3.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

dupliciously participating in its contests while pretending to rise above them.” These virtue theorists value performative politics in which the self is de-centered and actions are depersonalized. As Honig describes Arendtian politics, “unlike private realm behavior, political action does not derive its meaning from the intentions, motives, or goals of actors.” Honig goes on to note that for Arendt, “freedom is not a subject-centered condition. Arendt criticizes those who take freedom out of the contingent world of action, attach it to them subject, and internalize it by attributing it to the will.”¹⁵⁶ While virtue theorists wish to depersonalize political action when an action is taking place in the present, they force us to recognize the occluded in subject-centered political systems by “call[ing] attention to the remainders of the system, to the insinuations, cruelties, deceits, and inconsistencies, or virtue as a system of values.” Virtue theorists advance a positive politics by attempting to disrupt the normalizing and exclusionary practices with which virtue theorists replace politics:

Virtuosic action relieves the oppressive repetitions of nature, enabling Arendt’s actors to ‘establish relations and create new realities’ rather than merely repeat old ones. And it subverts the ‘rise of the social,’ the forces of normalization that discipline multiple selves into modes of subjectivity whose homogeneity disables the individuality Arendt celebrates. Arendtian virtue...has a role to play in the transvaluation of values, one that might embolden citizens for the ruptures, the genuinely discomfiting pleasures and uncertainties, of democratic political action.¹⁵⁷

We see here a close relationship in Arendt’s agonism between dividing the unity of the subject, depersonalizing political action, and overcoming the universalizing of the subject. We should also see how virtue politics opens possibilities for an Arendtian moment of creation in the present

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

in which one can individuate oneself through acts. Arendt urges thinking in the present — in which we cast off both tradition (from the past) and the centrality of the will (toward the future) — and creating something new and unprecedented in the world. What is valuable here is the notion that politics always remains ongoing, never finished, and always open to new voices of creative public actors.

Following the virtue theorists further, we can locate politics in spaces that they themselves left out. If politics is to remain open, we can always reconsider the idea that the personal can be political; that moral truth-telling based on personal experiences of oppression or visions of justice that spring from within ought to be manifested without. We can consider such an openness by illustrating the ways in which theorists have employed or critiqued Arendtian politics to find nontraditional spaces for action. In her critical readings of Arendt and Iris Marion Young, Jane Monica Drexler presents us with a dilemma that radicals from Plato onward have always had to consider: “[w]ithin established democratic processes, oppositional action — to be counted as proper, legitimate, political, reasonable, even sensible — must adhere to rules of a game that is rigged in favor of the maintenance of the very process the action wishes to disrupt.” When acting among others, often we must first adopt cultural norms and engage in mimicry if we hope to ever be able to individuate ourselves. We must earn the right to speak truth before we speak it.

Authentic truth-telling, then, becomes difficult on many fronts, especially for those in society who do not wear its formal costumes or hold its formal offices. As was the problem of truth-telling with Plato, as soon as truth is uttered to others, it becomes one opinion among many and loses its authority. But this is not only a problem for elites and philosophers who

contemplate another world, but for other excluded persons who live in this one. As Drexler notes about Young, even if cultural pluralism and tolerance of difference is valued on the surface, the dispossessed in society are often at a disadvantage for two further reasons: 1) exclusionary “norms of articulateness and dispassionateness” govern deliberation in the public sphere, and 2) an underlying “structural conflict of interest” cannot be assuaged simply by engaging in persuasive argument.¹⁵⁸ Thus, if the exclusionary society needs to change, those excluded who need it changed cannot speak to it, and even when they can, it becomes one opinion among many. Given this dilemma, Arendt offers Young an important tool: oppositional performative contestation. Arendtian rhetoric, for Young, could include “street demonstrations”, “rowdy, disorderly, and emotional speech and action”, “emotionally charged language and symbols” that “publicly ridicule or mock exclusive or dismissive behavior of others.” By “shift[ing] the focus of ‘politics proper’ away from a strict distinction between formal sites of deliberation,” Young is claiming to make room for excluded voices from the deliberative arena.¹⁵⁹

Yet, Drexler argues, the disruptive performative act Arendt theorizes is not primarily for the goal of inclusion for the excluded in public debate. Arendt is instead attempting to say something deeper about the nature of democratic participation: that freedom and spontaneity exist in the act itself. As Drexler notes:

What Arendt’s theories suggest is that it is not primarily that contestatory, performative acts enable inclusion or recognition—although they may in fact do so. What makes these acts crucial for deep democracy is that within their

¹⁵⁸ Jane Monica Drexler, "Politics Improper: Iris Marion Young, Hannah Arendt, and the Power of Performativity." *Hypatia* 22:4 (2007), 4.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

boundlessness, spontaneity, and resistibility lie the very possibilities of political freedom.¹⁶⁰

This type of immediate action from the excluded, Drexler points out, is not done in order to effect political outcomes, but are acted toward unpredictable ends; “the sheer act of doing” actions sends them out into a “web of human relationships through which they are filtered, challenged, and encountered by different actions and reactions of other actors.”¹⁶¹ Like Machiavelli’s *virtu*, Arendtian action lies in “the performance itself and not in an end product.”¹⁶² We see here a similarity to Villa’s reading of Arendt: acts do not necessarily achieve political legitimacy or inclusion for the claimant as ends, nor are they morally judged based on the inner intentions of the claimant, but they stand on their own to be judged, undirected, and without attachment to their authors.

The risk becomes that Arendtian action — with all of its spontaneity, boundlessness, lack of a predetermined direction, and lack of an author — is an aesthetic exercise by which individuals might reconnect with the world, but cannot change it. Here, the question becomes whether Arendt sought merely to overcome existential loneliness by connecting individuals in the sphere of action, or whether she actually wished to repoliticize the public realm in ways that pragmatic collective goals can be achieved that make the world a better place. Given these problems along with Arendt’s own words (her distaste for the civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s)¹⁶³, we can say that Arendt falls short of offering much theory for those

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶² Ibid., 9.

¹⁶³ Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 231-246.

who fight for social change or justice. The root of this shortcoming is in her opposition to the role of authenticity in politics which has given a voice for many (especially the powerless) to break out of the formal mechanisms of oppression.

From a social justice point of view, then, what is formally considered “political space” needs to be robust and able to relocate away from its formal setting of public deliberation. This location often requires going beyond the confines of Arendtian political space, defined *a priori*, to those spaces that are generated while people act. Thomas Dumm remarks:

The problem with [Arendt’s] conceptualization of space...is that in everyday human terms space is not neutral and unmarked, an open and infinite entity; it is shaped by people as they interact through, under, and outside of demarcated social fields of life.¹⁶⁴

We ought not be confined by locating the political strictly in a public space. Seyla Benhabib makes this point in recounting Arendt’s nostalgia for Greek politics:

What disturbs the contemporary reader is perhaps less the high-minded and highly idealized picture of Greek political life which Arendt draws but more her neglect of the following constellation of issues. The agonistic political space of the polis was only possible because large groups of human beings like women, slaves, laborers, non-citizen residents, and all non-Greeks were excluded from it and made possible through their ‘labor’ for the daily necessities of like that ‘leisure for politics’ which the few enjoyed; by contrast, the rise of the social was accompanied by the emancipation of these groups from the ‘shadowy interior of the household’ and by their entry into public life.¹⁶⁵

Arendtian politics is trapped within the same confines as Rousseauist politics because it essentializes the space in which politics ought to take place. Spaces locating the political and the non-political ought always to be renegotiated based on changing contexts and issues.

¹⁶⁴ Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 91.

For democratic, emancipatory movements to succeed in their aims, politics needs to remain open. Politics ought not be closed down by confining it to the interiority of the self, as the politics of authenticity and virtue theorists do. Nor ought it be shut down by confining it to a space of appearance alone, as performative politics and virtue theorists do. Democratic theory must always strive to locate — and relocate — the political in ways that avoid both tendencies to overcome politics. For this task, we turn to the earlier discussion on the difficulties Arendt posed in the Platonist/Rousseauist model of truth telling and prophesy in the public sphere.

Maria Tamboukou explores Arendt's figure of the *pariah* in conjunction with Michel Foucault's notion of *parrhesia*. The pariah can be defined as an outsider in a hostile world that excludes her and *parrhesia* can be defined as a form of truth-telling found in ancient Greek politics. Foucault says that there are four qualifications for speech to be *parrhesiastic*: it must speak the truth frankly rather than persuasively, it must be courageous (since it is criticism), it must come from the powerless who are located at the bottom of the power structure, and it is a duty that denotes what it means to be free. As we noted, for Arendt, the death of Socrates and Plato's subsequent "tyranny of truth" constituted the first major rupture of politics and philosophy in the West, where otherworldly truths replaced the fluctuation of the world. For Foucault, however, explains Tamboukou, Socrates' death is the "*parrhesiastic act par excellence*" that "instead of closing down possibilities of a relationship between politics and philosophy... actually creates conditions for a reconfiguration of this relationship."¹⁶⁶ Before Socrates' trial, the Greeks had created a "parrhesiastic pact" by which it was understood that the truth teller will

¹⁶⁶ Maria Tamboukou, "Truth Telling in Foucault and Arendt: Parrhesia, the Pariah and Academics in Dark times," *Journal of Education Policy* 27:6 (2012), 853.

tell the truth while the “prince” will listen without punishing. That the *demos* put Socrates to death was the most egregious breach of this pact. Courageously, Socrates displays his willingness to die in order to stay true to his beliefs. What comes to mind when we think about this event, however, should not be Plato’s subsequent retreat from the world of persuasion to the world of truth, but the connection between the beliefs and practices of Socrates, the truth-teller. Instead of focusing on a history of “philosophical doctrines” we should focus on “modes and styles of life, a history of the philosophical life as a philosophical problem.” The tension with which we must always grapple then is the one inherent to “a harmonious coexistence between *logos* and *bios*; a politics of “true life.”¹⁶⁷ By locating questions of politics within the technologies of the self, Foucault asks us to theorize the ways in which the self can represent, and then get a proper distance from one’s audience before speaking to it.

Conclusion

Arendtian political theory is enigmatic. It offers us many, often contradictory ways of doing politics in the modern world. It seeks to depersonalize politics while bringing citizens together out of their loneliness. It seeks to create a public sphere in which men and women can achieve personal freedom while preventing personal issues from entering it. And it offers us a return to the agonism of the Greek polis while embracing certain associational qualities of modernity. What brings these together is the Arendtian value of depersonalized political action, in which the private spaces of the modern *sentiment interieur* and the traditional household are left out of public deliberation and judgment. Here, we can find both anti-elitist and an anti-

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 854-5.

democratic stances. It is anti-elitist in its hostility toward philosophy (with philosophers from Plato to Rousseau as the main culprits) and it is anti-democratic in its dismissal of the politicizing of private grievances by the oppressed or those who claim to represent them (with radicals and reformers from the Jacobins the American social movements of the 1960s). Following in the *virtu* tradition of Machiavelli and Nietzsche, Arendt seeks to open politics to new ideas and spontaneous actions. But they are instigated by external costumes that serve as buffers between the individual and others, rather than from internal expressions that serve to unite them in their humanity.

With the Rousseauist tradition in mind, the Arendtian requirement for costumed political action discounts many of the most important social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which relied upon the power of autobiography, personal expression, and shining light into private spaces of oppression. Yet we must take care to avoid a politics that ceases to end democratic contestation by collapsing the distance between citizens. These are difficulties to which we will turn in the following chapter on Henry David Thoreau.

CHAPTER FOUR: Henry David Thoreau's Theatrical Authenticity

We have seen until now that the disagreement between authentic politics and theatrical politics is grounded on two main interrelated issues: the source of truth for an individual's speech act and the relationship between speaker and audience. For the Rousseauists who promote authentic politics, the source of truth for an individual's speech is internal; it is discovered through introspection in solitude apart from the community. Once joining with a community, that truth is then delivered to an audience directly, without masking or obscuring that speech and without regard to the audience reaction. The transparency between actors and audiences creates an intimate political community based not on deception but rather on the demonstrably true intentions of public speakers. Public judgment, then, is focused within the speaking and acting individual, beyond her public persona.

For the Arendtians who promote theatrical politics, the external world of others provides the content for the individual's speech act. This content is discovered through what Arendt calls "thinking," whereby the thinker "internalizes the audience" for one's future action, thereby never mentally removing oneself off from the community of fellow citizens. The "self" that individuals discover through thinking is not unitary as it is for the Rousseauists, because it is reached through an inner dialogue one has between inner multiple selves that have been cultivated by an external, plural world. This politics envisions an agonal public life in which individual public speakers remain opaque to one another. Public judgment, then, is aimed not at the inner intentions of public actors themselves but at the externalized words and deeds they perform.

I argue in this chapter that Henry David Thoreau (with his fellow Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman) gives us a politics that can resist the colonization of

the self that each of these politics can cause in their extreme forms by presenting an alternative vision for politics and for practices of self-cultivation. Thoreau began his career as an educator in Concord, MA and left based on his unwillingness to administer corporal punishment to students. Later he became a writer and transcendentalist under the guidance of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would later provide him with the plot of land on which he would live and write *Walden*. He serves as a valuable guide for re-imagining a type of politics that can establish the integrity of the self without leading to the complete eradication of the protective barriers of the private self that Arendt said was caused by the politics of authenticity. Private life is left unharmed and is thus free to live in a poetic relationship to reality, able to explore the depths and multitudes of the soul. At the same time that Thoreau protects this private sphere, he gives us a politics that allows for personal expression in the public sphere that sheds the public persona. In his writings, he gives us not only a deep exploration of the private self (for which he is often either celebrated or derided), but different modes of citizenship to be dispatched in different contexts. By oscillating between different modes of political action — sometimes personal and expressive, sometimes public and performative — Thoreau demonstrates a dynamic range of citizenship styles that carefully protect the integrity of the private self while generating public action.¹⁶⁸

Presenting Thoreau as a political actor is not without controversy. Political theorists have widely dismissed Thoreau. They claim that he is at best a significant literary figure and at worst, an apolitical wallflower who contributes no action into the public realm. Most pointedly, Arendt

¹⁶⁸ Jack Turner, “Thoreau as a Political Thinker” in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2009), 2.

claims that not only is Thoreau not a political actor, but that he never intended to be: “Thoreau did not pretend that a man’s washing his hands of [wrong] would make the world better...Here, as elsewhere, conscience is unpolitical.”¹⁶⁹ This depiction of Thoreau as an apolitical figure is unwarranted. Firstly, it misses the fact that Thoreau’s privatism may sometimes show his dedication to pluralism. The provocative (not authoritative) nature of Thoreau’s political writings demonstrates his understanding that he is one voice among many. He does not speak of “man” as a universal subject, as philosophers from Plato to Rousseau do, nor does he espouse any form of coercion by the state to compel a notion of civic freedom. Thoreau insists at the beginning of *Walden* that he is not instructing others, but letting them read his thoughts from a distance. And he admits “I am confined to this theme [of talking about himself] by the narrowness of my own experience.”¹⁷⁰ While Thoreau speaks from his own conscience, it is never as a universal truth for all individuals.

There are several ways in which Thoreau may be seen as a “Rousseauist” who urges authenticity and sincerity in public speech. At the personal level, both Rousseau and Thoreau are traditionally cast as romantics who laud the psychological and spiritual benefits of solitude and hold disdain for etiquette in polite society. Just as Rousseau saw Parisian social mores infused with veiled manipulation, so Thoreau regretted the social masks in his time and place: “We meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste for that musty old cheese that we are.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Or, Life in the Woods* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 1.

We have to agree on a certain set of rules, called etiquette and politeness, to make this frequent meeting tolerable.”¹⁷¹

At the political level, both seem to see a natural connection between the shallowness of politeness and the inability for their own societies to confront the deeper issues of injustice, inequality, alienation, and brutality that each engenders. In his politics, Thoreau often speaks the Rousseauist language of authenticity and conscience. He speaks this language of prophecy in his public address in order to recover his own moral conscience in the face of injustice and complacency over slavery. He then aims, with his prophetic voice, to aid others in recovering their own consciences. As a mode of political speech, prophesy is Rousseauist in character, because of the role of the prophet, the mode in which he or she addresses the prophetic message to the audience, and the content of the message itself. This truth that is the prophet announces can be discovered by the prophet either through religious means (looking upward) or secular means (looking within), as Thoreau notes in *Civil Disobedience*: “I see that appeal is possible, first and instantaneously, from them to the Maker of them, and secondly, from them to themselves.”¹⁷² What makes this mode of address authentic or sincere in the Rousseauist sense is that it involves separating oneself from the community of others so that the moral truth discovered is discovered from a unitary source, and not sullied by multiple conflicting, and often manipulative, voices in the public realm. In the moments when Thoreau is engaging in prophetic truth-telling, we see an uneasiness with the type of pluralism (differences of opinion and action mitigated by impersonal

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 430.

¹⁷² Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" in *Civil Disobedience, and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993).

formal institutions) that authentic politics tends to reject. According to George Schulman the danger in prophesy is that it “bears a vexed relationship to democratic politics” because it “lacks an Aristotelian dimension, an explicit valuation of ongoing political life. After all, biblical prophets invoke God’s authority to provoke contest about pervasive practices long deemed legitimate, not to defend a pluralism of valid truths and worthy goods.”¹⁷³

The content of the prophetic message itself deals with the relationship of the community to larger social and political injustices. In his essay “Thoreau, Prophesy, and Politics,” Shulman says that as an office, prophesy mediates between a community and the realities it does not understand or control. The role of the prophet is to announce to the community its moral failings away from its own founding ideals. The prophet does this through the use of a jeremiad, which contains social criticism within it, orienting the community toward its origins. In Thoreau’s expressed hostility to “what is called politics” in his day, he seeks to uproot a day to day political passivity of complacency over slavery and imperialism, even within the supposedly “free” states in the north.¹⁷⁴ There is, of course, a danger in assigning too much authority to the prophet for fear of the development of a violent and undemocratic state of exception, but Shulman’s treatment of Thoreau’s prophesy sees it placed in a long tradition of American prophets who use their offices for counter-hegemonic purposes.

Politically, Thoreau’s writing about societal ideals at a distance from his neighbors puts him in the tradition of the literary practice of prophesy. Many times throughout *Walden*, it is ev-

¹⁷³ George Shulman, “Thoreau, Prophesy, and Politics” in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2009), 125.

¹⁷⁴ Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience,” 9.

ident that the type of moral truths he discovers about his society can only be done in nature, at a certain distance from the artificiality of the city. In Thoreau's chapter "The Bean Field" from *Walden*, he gains insight into the injustice and ignorance he sees in his neighbors and in the larger political culture they create. While hoeing his beans, Thoreau stumbles upon archeological evidence of past native civilizations. This leads to the insight that America was not founded upon a virgin continent, thereby calling into question widespread accepted assumptions underlying the type of American exceptionalism that blinds Americans to the systematic injustice in which they participate. But Thoreau is not in complete isolation and thus can hear the echoes of civilization from afar. During his archeological discovery, he hears martial music and celebratory cheering from afar as Massachusetts militiamen are deployed to fight in the war against Mexico. As an echo, it is close enough for him to notice and make a playful remark about how he felt he could "spit a Mexican with good relish." But it is far away enough that he was not emotionally caught up in what must have been a stirring, nationalistic celebration in town.¹⁷⁵ These are insights he would not have had in the shallow togetherness in the bustling, noisy town square.

We can read Thoreau's prophesy as both a reaction to a type of politics in solitude and as a reformulation of politics from the position of solitude. This is the same type of critique and reformulation that Rousseau demonstrates in his relationship to the artificiality of bustling Paris which in his mind, was also devoid of moral conscience among the citizenry, and thus any meaningful politics. Yet for Thoreau, the end of his reformulation shuns the creation of organic community. As Jonathan McKenzie notes in his paper "How To Mind Your Own Business: Thoreau on Political Indifference," Thoreau's recontracting always leaves room for retreat from togeth-

¹⁷⁵ Thoreau, *Walden*, 104.

ness.¹⁷⁶ This modifies Rousseau's reformulation of the proper political community in which the eventual recontracting of society is based on the joy in the intimacy and togetherness of the citizens.

Thoreau's reluctant stance toward intimacy shows the Arendtian side of his politics. Like Arendt, Thoreau's corrective for the loss of self is the dynamic thinking that takes place in solitude. Once the self is recovered, it is equipped with political agency. At times, Thoreau moves away from his Rousseauist romanticism and his recovery rejects the reification of the self as a unitary and moral agent set apart from the community. Along with his fellow Transcendentalists Emerson and Whitman (who collectively make up what George Kateb calls "the Emersonians"), Thoreau leaves the language of authenticity behind and instead celebrates his own fractured and multitudinous sense of self and relatedly, his reverence for democratic pluralism in politics. I make a normative argument here in favor of a politics that relies on the fractured self we see in Arendt-inspired postmodern theorists like Foucault, George Kateb, and Thomas Dumm. I explain the ways in which Thoreau's more performative practices can be embedded in this tradition. It is these moments that we can see the flexibility of Thoreau's politics since it encompasses more than its authentic, prophetic, Rousseauist assumptions alone.

Kateb describes the ways in which the decentered self is the best agent for democracy. In his book *The Inner Ocean*, Kateb follows Foucault's view that "[t]he individual is a product of power." He employs Foucault's critiques of the Cartesian self and the public power that creates it. Like Foucault, he defends the notions of the decentered self and a destabilized public

¹⁷⁶ Jonathan Mckenzie, "How To Mind Your Own Business: Thoreau on Political Indifference," *The New England Quarterly* 84:3 (2011), 422-43.

realm. Kateb quotes Foucault, “[w]hat is needed is to ‘de-individualize’ by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond united hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization.”¹⁷⁷ Kateb then comments on this: “I suppose that the sort of group [Foucault] wants is a passionate but temporary affinity group. Each person will belong to many groups, serially or concurrently.”¹⁷⁸

But these critiques do not mean that Kateb rejects individuality. He supports it in its anti-Cartesian, decentered form. Kateb says that in their own unique practices of individualism, “The Emersonians” (Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman) share an affinity with Foucault on the goal of de-individualization. Kateb shows how they transcend the culturally-implanted “expression of personality,” which connotes the individual as a being, by teaching what it means to be an individual becoming. This transcendence involves three types of individuality: positive, negative, and impersonal. Positive individuality involves making a project out of one’s life by “living deliberately.” This involves deviation from a conformist style of individuality which is commonly mistaken for real authenticity. Negative individuality is closely related, since it involves the practice of “no-saying” to unjust and inauthentic conventions and laws. This is seen most poignantly in Thoreau’s resistance in Civil Disobedience.¹⁷⁹

While both of these modes of individualism are important in themselves, they lead to the mode which aesthetically connects individuals in a democracy: impersonal individuality. This is an “awareness [of] democratic ecstasy” in “self-abandonment,” moving “away from egotism.”

¹⁷⁷ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 233.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

Rather than the expressive self, which, as both Foucault and Kateb argue is the product of discipline, the Emersonians stress the “cultivated inward self” which allows one to experience “an opening onto the reality of the world..” We see this clearly stated by Emerson when he says that in this state of being “all mean egotism vanishes.”¹⁸⁰ In this state, the individual achieves a sense of immortality. As Kateb says, to be in this state “is to know that no matter how long one lived one would never run out of sentences to say and write about the nature and course of life.”¹⁸¹

While Arendt described self-desertion as loneliness, in which “when I am all by myself I am deserted by my own self,” Kateb shows the democratic virtues of this strange experience of losing one’s attachment to the world and turning inward. Turning inward rather than externalizing the self is an important prepolitical stage for both the Rousseauist and Arendtian models of politics for different reasons. For Rousseau, it is to find the unitary self which will later be expressed to others. For Arendt, the inward turn is meant to discover the multiple selves one possesses that have been cultivated by one’s experience in a world of plurality. Emerson and Thoreau both demonstrate the ecstatic experience of the inward turn without much indication that it serves any immediate political purpose. But Whitman illustrates the multiplicity of selves one finds from the inward turn, and the democratic possibilities behind such a discovery. He mirrors Arendt’s connection between finding multiple voices internally in the self and experiencing multiple voices externally in the world. This is shown in Whitman’s famous assertion that he “contain[s] multitudes.” Kateb details how the “hallucinatory quality” of Whitman’s “Song of Myself” shows “an assortment of genres,” a “dreamlike mobility of identity,” and “the feeling that

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., *The Inner Ocean*, 236.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 91.

our nature is strange.” This is rejection of Cartesian self-knowledge, since the poem shows that “[k]nowing oneself is therefore knowing that there is no single, transparent entity to know.” In his breakdown of any single transparent entity, Kateb’s Whitman is also defying a “religious conception of the soul” in favor of a more secular conception. For Kateb, “the direct and indirect lessons of the poem are democratic lessons in connectedness.” They recognize the infinite potentialities within one’s self and others: “there is always more to know about oneself than one can say” and “[j]ust as I am more than others can take in, so they are more than I can take in.” This realization about the self and others has the effect of “intensify[ing] the mutuality between strangers, which is intrinsic to the idea of rights-based individualism in a democracy.” “Song of Myself” is not strictly autobiographical for Kateb. When Whitman writes “What I assume you shall assume,” Kateb says, “It is not that we must obey him as we read him...if we understand the poem, we will see that the poet and his readers are alike.”¹⁸² We eventually see the democratic significance attached to the realization that one “contains multitudes” in Thoreau’s experience of solitude at Walden Pond. Echoing Arendt’s call for the thinker in solitude to be “together with himself,” Thoreau says “[w]ith thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense.” Thoreau says he experiences “a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another...I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me that is not a part of me, but spectator.”¹⁸³

Thoreauvian politics helps avert the possibility that society will devolve into a type of Rousseauist intimacy or general will that bonds people together so tightly as to prevent agonal

¹⁸² Ibid., 252-53.

¹⁸³ Thoreau, *Walden*, 88.

politics. Rather, it engages in what Kateb calls the “episodic citizenship” of “democratic individuality.” Thoreau’s politics of “no-saying” in Civil Disobedience, argues Kateb, is “a strong dissolver of the mystique of authority, first in the public realm and, ineluctably, in all others well.”¹⁸⁴ A culture of democratic individuality does not dictate the physical togetherness of citizens in a confined public space as does an intimate culture of authenticity. Rather, it acknowledges the protection of everyone’s rights, even those of strangers.¹⁸⁵ By sensing multiplicity within his own thinking, Thoreau avoids the type of radical unity and wholeness of the self Arendt claims leads from a lack of thinking to loneliness and finally to widespread madness and depoliticization of the world. There are moments when Thoreau seems to anticipate Arendt’s connection between these ideas. In his chapter “Solitude” from *Walden*, Thoreau describes loneliness as an existential, rather than a physical phenomenon: “[w]e are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our own chambers.”¹⁸⁶ He can avoid loneliness in his own solitude by engaging in a type of free play that breaks up the unitary self Rousseau sought to establish. Through this play, he describes himself as “a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections...sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another...I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator.”¹⁸⁷ Thoreau goes on in this chapter to detail an allegory that denotes the madness that can ensue in states of loneliness and

¹⁸⁴ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Thoreau, *Walden*, 88.

¹⁸⁷ Thoreau, *Walden*, 84.

the illusions that can follow. He tells the story of “a man lost in the woods and dying of famine and exhaustion...whose loneliness was relieved by grotesque visions...which he believed to be real.” He links this experience to our illusions about “normal and natural society” which falsely makes us “come to know that we are never alone.”¹⁸⁸ Thoreau’s story of the madman relates to Arendt’s vision of totalitarianism, in which lonely and mad individuals are lured into illusory visions of togetherness and organic unity despite our fundamental reality of separateness and opaqueness in the public realm. For both Arendt and Thoreau, overcoming loneliness involves recovery of the self, but not the authentic Rousseauist self embedded in a community. Rather, the prepolitical self in solitude is a “scene” upon which one can playfully converse with oneself based on one’s experiences with the world.

Thoreau’s multiplicity in his own thinking also allows him to acknowledge the fundamental reality of pluralism in the public world. It affords himself the mental space to engage in Arendt’s Socratic practice of “internalizing the audience.” For Arendt, this mental act allowed one to stay connected to the plural world of others, even when taking respite from it. Thoreau’s internalization of the audience makes this connection with others as well, but also establishes the mental space for disconnection from this plural world. Jane Bennett argues that “Thoreau’s project of self-fashioning” in solitude involves recognizing moments of what she calls “the They” within him, which is his realization in any given moment that he is passively and thoughtlessly conforming his thoughts and behaviors to those of others.¹⁸⁹ Thoreau’s They is not only an

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 89.

¹⁸⁹ Jane Bennett, “Thoreau’s Techniques of Self” in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2009), 295.

“audience” to internalize for the sake of retaining a connection to the external world as it is in Arendt’s Socratic mode of thinking, but a force to be constantly resisted in order for one to live independently.

Thoreau’s internalization of the audience is also for the sake of being able to perform to an audience in public for a collective political purpose. Thoreau’s most famous political writing “Resistance to Civil Government” (later renamed “Civil Disobedience”) is the strongest example of the “no-saying” inherent to the negative individuality praised by George Kateb and others. This emphasis on Thoreau as primarily a no-sayer led Arendt to remark that the act of conscience was “unpolitical.” In her formulation, it was not a self-initiated action meant to lead to any collective good, or primarily to persuade an audience, but rather a private act meant to publicly wash his own hands of participation in injustice. In order to satisfy an Arendtian qualification for political action, an act must be positive and stem from one’s own political agency. Thoreau’s 1859 speech “A Plea for Captain John Brown” meets this criteria.

Thoreau’s act of speaking in favor of John Brown was a positive political act because unlike his night in jail over refusing to pay a tax, Thoreau initiated this action himself (even going so far as to ring the meetinghouse bell to announce the lecture, which no one else would do due to ambivalence in Concord over Brown’s actions). It is at once authentic and performative; bridging the gap between the Rousseauist emphasis on public expression of the private moral conscience and the Arendtian emphasis on the creation of an object for public judgment; one that is conjured by evoking a common principle rather than the character of the actor or speaker.

The speech is an Arendtian political act for its performative character. According to Jack Turner, Thoreau demonstrates how “the performance of conscience before an audience trans-

forms the invocation of conscience from a personally political act into a publicly political one...the aim of the performance is to provoke one's neighbors into a process of individual self-reform that will make them capable of properly vigilant democratic citizenship and conscientious political agitation."¹⁹⁰ Thoreau used rhetoric about the Christ-like qualities of the widely despised John Brown: "Some eighteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified, this morning, perchance, Captain John Brown was hung. These are the two ends of a chain which is not without its links." He went on to both equate Brown with his own intellectual movements, calling him "a transcendentalist above all" and even more shockingly, "the most American of us all."¹⁹¹ This rhetoric was shocking indeed for the townspeople of Concord and for Northerners and Americans in general. Thoreau sought to provoke from his audience an "aesthetic awe" that focuses their attention on the memorialization of Brown's words and deeds; the very types of objects Arendt sought to make the exclusive objects of politics, since they could be judged in the public realm of appearance rather than the hidden private realm behind the veil of the actor.

The speech was prophetic and authentic at the same time as it was performative. The mixing of registers used by Thoreau speaks to the redemptive project in which he is engaged both as a prophet seeking to return the nation to its principles and as a performer focusing on his audience. Thoreau's statement about how Brown was "the most American of us all" was not only meant to shock, but to say something about the idealism of America while seeking to redeem its people toward a better ideal going forward. With this declaration, as Turner points out,

¹⁹⁰ Jack Turner, "Thoreau and John Brown" in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2009), 153.

¹⁹¹ Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea For Captain John Brown" in *Civil Disobedience, and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993).

Thoreau was lauding the idea of both Brown and America at the same time, even though the latter fell short of its ideals. Throughout the speech and elsewhere in Thoreau's writings, we see that Thoreau is not rejecting politics as a vehicle that can lead toward justice, but that he seeks to change politics from a meaningless practice to one in which individuals can exercise their consciences.¹⁹²

A major distinguishing factor between the Rousseauist and Arendtian models of politics has to do with both physical and communicative distance between citizens. On this issue, we see Thoreau bridge the gap. In his 1972 landmark exegesis of *Walden*, Stanley Cavell calls Henry David Thoreau a "visible saint." Cavell explains that Thoreau's distance of "one mile from any neighbor...was just far enough to be seen clearly." This partial withdrawal into solitude and away from the community follows in traditions of Puritan Congregationalism, where gaining authority to speak involves a complex consideration of the source of truth from which the speaker is speaking and the opacity or transparency between speaker and audience. Cavell explains, "the audience for the writer's words and acts is the community at large, congregated. [Thoreau's] problem, initially and finally, is not to learn what to say to them; that could not be clearer. The problem is to establish his right to declare it."¹⁹³ Establishing this right involves striking a proper balance between acting as an aristocrat outside and above the community or acting as a fellow citizen speaking to and with it.

¹⁹² It is important to note here that Thoreau is not necessarily endorsing Brown's actions as political. In fact, John himself was rejecting politics. But by monumentalizing the shocking and controversial *example* of Brown, Thoreau himself is acting politically, in the Arendtian sense, by persuading his audience through shock value.

¹⁹³ Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 11.

In *Walden*, Thoreau's seclusion from his neighbors allows him space for living authentically. Based on Thoreau's location to his audience, Kateb says that Thoreau (along with Emerson and Whitman) celebrates "democratic individuality" which he says "is not an incitement to the life of intimacy or to a cult of 'personal relations'" but respects the "pathos of distance."¹⁹⁴ But this distance is not too much, nor is it simply a negative protection of his selfhood, it also allows him to serve a positive good to the community as a follow democratic citizen. And it gives us a way to transcend the strictness of both the Rousseauist and Arendtian models on the question of the relationship of the private to the public. Arendt and others also miss the fact that Thoreauvian politics, more willing to negotiate the private/public dividing line, has led to concrete movements for equality. While movement leaders in America have performed a certain amount of Arendt virtuosity in their political protests, they have been driven by private conscience discovered in solitude which sometimes breaks forth into the public realm at key moments, as it did for Thoreau with his John Brown speech one year before the American Civil War. Thomas Dumm argues that democratic movements for inclusion have found alternative spaces for speech and action that overcome Arendt's dichotomy:

The problem with [Arendt's] conceptualization of space...is that in everyday human terms space is not neutral and unmarked, an open and infinite entity; it is shaped by people as they interact through, under, and outside of demarcated social fields of life.¹⁹⁵

Thoreau demonstrates that he himself as a political actor can alter what is considered private and what is considered public as he thinks and acts through time. The space of separateness

¹⁹⁴ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 97.

¹⁹⁵ Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 37.

that Thoreau voluntarily creates between himself and his community is not aristocratic (the type of complete seclusion from the populace envisioned for Plato's *Philosopher Kings* for instance). He remains close enough to town that his experiment in "living deliberately" at Walden Pond can both reach his neighbors and even occasionally be informed by them, but far enough away that his own ability to think clearly is not confused by the clamors of the populace. According to Cavell, the distance Thoreau has from his neighbors at Walden gives him the opportunity to "perform an experiment, a public demonstration of a truth...to become an example."¹⁹⁶ Nancy Rosenblum points out in her essay "Thoreau's Democratic Individualism" that Thoreau "does not allow detachment to fatally separate him from his neighbors. We know that Walden Pond was within range of Concord, and Thoreau remarks on how close the Maine forests are. Both are available to anyone, and neither is more than a partial and temporary retreat."¹⁹⁷

Thoreau's need for distance from his audience of readers differs from the communicative modes of both Rousseauist and Arendtian citizens. Public life for Rousseau should contain a high degree of transparency between individuals in his "festivals of democracy." Arendt's politics also promotes a shared public "space of appearance," but one in which the private self retains its opacity by remaining shielded from public judgment. In both cases, we see a politics where bodies and actions appear in public space among others. But communication and deliberation, for Thoreau in *Walden*, requires time and space between citizens that only a society of readers and writers can achieve. This is evident in the distance from others from which Thoreau

¹⁹⁶ Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Nancy Rosenblum, "Thoreau's Democratic Individualism" in *A Political Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Jack Turner (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2009), 2.

writes. As Brian Walker argues, this distance allows *Walden* to be a “cultivation text” containing a “take it or leave it” approach to Thoreau’s example in living. It provokes rather than instructs, thus respecting the opacity and diversity of his individual readers and thus the plurality, while still being able to express a private truth.¹⁹⁸

Thoreau discovers his own multiple selves through introspection in apolitical solitude away from the community, the generation of which gives him knowledge about both himself and about the external plural world. In this way, Thoreau’s politics encompasses both the introspective aspects of Rousseau and the external, public practices of Arendt. Yet Thoreau’s politics is more than simply just a mixture of the two models. It can be highlighted by focusing on the role of language for Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists. Through the very act of his audience reading *Walden*, Thoreau is always attempting to get us — along with him and each other — to find our own poetical relationship to nature that can overcome the shallowness we have learned from everyday social conventions. In this way, Thoreau is speaking to his audience not “authentically” as an expression of his own radically subjective thoughts, nor “performatively” as a speech-act that is outside and between him and them, but through an alternative conception of space between reader and writer that goes beyond these two models: he is trying to get us to interpret the relationship between ourselves and the natural world along with him, but ultimately through our own subjective experience of it. The writer/reader relationship replaces the speaker/audience one. Writer and reader are connected not through traditional conceptions of the space or time between them but through the poetical nature of language itself. Lastly, rather than this relationship leading to some sort of universally shared identity as the speaker/audience does for

¹⁹⁸ Brian Walker, “Thoreau on Democratic Cultivation,” *Political Theory* 29:2 (2001): 156.

Rousseau (a shared humanity cultivated from within) and Arendt (a shared citizenship cultivated from the outside), this relationship keeps both writer and reader connected not to each other but to their shared observation of the direct connection of language to the world.

This type of connection between writer and reader is only possible when we consider the way Thoreau and his fellow Transcendentalists understood the fundamentally poetical nature of language. Philip Gura points out in his book *American Transcendentalism* that the theology of the Transcendentalists saw Christian scripture (and other divinely inspired texts) not as prose but as a “primitive poetry of the soul” that was “draped most effectively in the imagery of nature” where “verbal signs originally stemmed from man’s observation of the natural world.”¹⁹⁹

Thomas Dumm says that the poetic style with which Thoreau writes about his observations of the natural world in *Walden* urges his readers to “work the mouth” and “read aloud the shape of the sounds of the letters that form the words” (employing the “guttural g,” for instance) so that the written words he is writing reconnect with the shapes and sounds his readers make with their mouths as they read. In this way for Dumm, “Thoreau hopes to remind us of the deepest connections of words to embodiment, and embodiment to the world.”²⁰⁰ Stanley Cavell’s *Senses of Walden* is his attempt to rewrite *Walden* in such a way that emphasizes how its poetry gives us a direct experience of what Thoreau experiences sensually in nature. Cavell himself is trying to relive the sensual experience of *Walden* by sharing Thoreau’s observation of language and thus, share Thoreau’s experience of the way his words connect immediately with the natural world.

¹⁹⁹ Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, 44.

²⁰⁰ Dumm, *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, 93.

Even though we can share this experience universally, we need distance from each other in order to do so. In discussing visitors to Walden, Thoreau explains why this distance is necessary:

One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port. The bullet of your thought must have overcome its lateral and ricochet motion and fallen into its last and steady course before it reaches the ear of the hearer, else it may plough out again through the side of his head. Also, our sentences wanted room to unfold and form their columns in the interval. Individuals, like nations, must have suitable broad and national boundaries, even a considerable neutral ground between them.²⁰¹

Beyond this connection between writer and reader, there are three recognitions that make the Emersonians' writings "democratic," according to Kateb, rather than expressive or authoritarian in tone. Firstly, the Aristocratic ideal of the self as a beautiful object for contemplation becomes democratized in a political culture that respects the rights of individuals to cultivate themselves: "such individuality can exist as a possibility for all."²⁰² Secondly and relatedly, the imagery of the Emersonians poeticizes and beautifies the common and the ugly in their writings. Particularly, Whitman "makes poetic room for the homely, the unimportant, the obscure, the overlooked, the despised, the wicked, and the diseased."²⁰³ Thirdly, "the direct and indirect lessons of the poem are democratic lessons in connectedness." They recognize the infinite potentialities within one's self and others: "there is always more to know about oneself than one can say" and "[j]ust as I am more than others can take in, so they are more than I can take in." This realization about the self and others has the effect of "intensify[ing] the mutuality between

²⁰¹ Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*, 91.

²⁰² Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 96.

²⁰³ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 253.

strangers, which is intrinsic to the idea of rights-based individualism in a democracy.” “Song of Myself” is not strictly autobiographical for Kateb. When Whitman writes “What I assume you shall assume,” Kateb says, “It is not that we must obey him as we read him...if we understand the poem, we will see that the poet and his readers are alike.”²⁰⁴

Reverence for a society of readers and writers is something we see among all the Transcendentalists, Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman. At the political level, this communication through the written word achieves a modest degree of communicative bonds among the citizenry, but not too much intimacy to suffocate individuality and suffer the pitfalls of mass society. Apart from politics, at the personal level, written language takes on a more spiritual dimension for the Transcendentalists. For Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman, the complexities, ambiguities, and conflicts within the depth of the inner soul is to be sought in spaces shielded from public opinion and public practices and institutions. For Emerson, language is not simply a mode of communication between individuals, but serves a vital private good. It is a vehicle through which one can realize the change in oneself by changing one’s utterances:

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.”²⁰⁵

Kateb states that for Emerson, language establishes a “poetical relation to reality” through the written word in which one can endlessly explore the depth of the soul privately.

²⁰⁴ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 244.

²⁰⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 138.

Kateb describes an “inwardness” or “depth of soul” as “unconscious motives; obscure motives, movements, and associations; the capacity to feign or be double; the capacity to talk to oneself; the capacity to draw things out by thinking them over; and above all the capacity to surprise oneself and others in one’s speech and writing....” “Language,” says Kateb, is the “one great source of depth, and its sole guarantor.”²⁰⁶ Thus language, while vital for a limited and measured degree of social communication among citizens, it even more vital as a personal practice for the soul to realize its own immortality, which is, for Kateb’s Emerson, “to know that no matter how long one lived one would never run out of sentences to say and write about the nature and course of life.”²⁰⁷ When Thoreau says “I desire to speak somewhere without bonds” in his attempt to “lay the foundation of a true expression” he is saying something similar to Emerson’s remark about immortality.²⁰⁸ “Bonds” in this case refer to social conventions and pragmatic political concerns in which one must consider one’s audience when speaking. As we have seen this unrestricted freedom of speech does not always apply to public life for Thoreau as he must fashion his speech to his audience at moments. But in private, the ability for boundless speech allows for the constant regeneration of the self.

Thoreau demonstrates to his audience in *Walden* that in order to live in plurality among fellow citizens, one must first playfully cultivate the multitudinous self or else one will be vulnerable to a thoughtless and dangerous conformism once in public. Thoreau’s cultivation in solitude wards off the extreme of existential loneliness described by Arendt by maintaining an inter-

²⁰⁶ Kateb, *The Inner Ocean*, 236.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 90.

²⁰⁸ Thoreau, *Walden*, 213.

nal dialogue between multiple inner selves. That cultivation of solitude is a preparation for the self to live in plurality as an episodic citizen equipped with moral conscience. The internal plurality within us both allows us to develop a conscience and prepares us to engage with the external plural world around us. The multiple selves Thoreau finds within allow him to act out these multiple selves in public. Sometimes the self he displays is without regard to his audience and is thus authentic and prophetic: sometimes it is crafted toward a particular audience and is thus performative. Thoreau not only oscillates between a private and public self, but is able to demonstrate different types of citizenship when in public. The act of writing for Thoreau and his fellow Transcendentalists Emerson and Whitman serves a communicative function but even more importantly, a private function of exploring the inner soul, so that new selves are constantly in formation to keep in step with the changing external world. Thoreauvian privatism should not be characterized as either a withdrawal from the duties of democratic citizenship nor as an isolated act of navel-gazing. Rather, it is a great example of democratic individuality that finds alternative spaces for action to navigate the difficult division between private and public life.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we have been exploring the ways in which authenticity and theatricality have been theorized and exercised in modern politics since the Enlightenment. The norm of authenticity, it holds, dictates that one always tell the truth in politics, that one maintain that voice of truth consistently across different audiences, and that ideally, truth-telling can generate emancipatory politics for those persons who have been shut out of the free public sphere by artificial sources of injustice. This conception of authenticity seeks consistency and transparency between one's intentions and actions, between one's beliefs in past, present and future beliefs, and finally between the unitary authentic self and others in the community. And perhaps most importantly for our political culture, "what is called politics" (as Henry David Thoreau reformulates it in *Civil Disobedience*) no longer centers on the shared, external realm of appearance as it did for the Greeks and even for the American founders, but on the dark recesses of the individual mind and soul: the conscience, the intention, and the morality of the individual.

For modern culture, authenticity remains the principle personal trait consumers of politics and culture look for in public figures. Yet the revolutionary edge of "being yourself" has given way to a consumer culture in which authenticity has been normalized (and, relatedly, commoditized). We can see this through many examples in the realms of politics and of pop culture in general. The American media (and its consumers, presumably), are shocked not necessarily when it discovers a nefarious act by an individual, but when it discovers that such an act creates a rift in an individual's private life and public presentation. Often, the private-public rift carries

with it a more severe public castigation than the act itself. From Richard Nixon to Bill Cosby, the uncovering of the veneer of the public mask is seen by itself as a political act.

All this is not to say that hidden intentions, the rift between private and public selves, and the sincerity of public actors ought not to be highlighted at all in our public discourse. (For instance, the difference in the severity of the punishment for first degree and second degree murder is valid since one is based on more nefarious inner intentions behind the act). Likewise, to a degree, the perceived intentions of office holders ought to be fair game when judging political actions. It is when intention is the overwhelming or only concern that we lose sight of the idea that political outcomes ought to be a collective endeavor, not simply the result of an individual's wishes. For much of last decade, liberals bemoaned the idea that George W Bush was unabashed about making decisions based on his "gut" rather than on what they saw as nuanced facts and evidence in the real world. In the New York Times, Ron Suskin suggests that Bush's own focus on his inner self in interviews about public policy stem from his born-again experience, a quite personal, inner-directed way of transforming one's self in the world.²⁰⁹ This is not dissimilar from the Protestant theories of Luther and the quasi-Protestant writings of Rousseau, who, as noted earlier, both stress the centrality of the inner life, both in political action and in judgment of political action. Conservatives have also focused their judgment on the inner intentions of Barack Obama. Conservative David Limbaugh, author of *The Great Destroyer: Barack Obama's War on the Republic* asks a number of rhetorical questions:

Does Obama harbor a grudge against America? What did he mean when he said he wanted to fundamentally change America? What did his wife mean when she

²⁰⁹ Ron Siskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush." New York Times Magazine. October 17, 2004.

said she'd never been proud of America in her adult life before he rose to power?
What possesses Obama to deride and apologize for America?

Limbaugh's answer is that while he does not believe Barack Obama is intentionally trying to "destroy America" (which, he grants, is a perfectly valid question), he does not assign good intentions behind Obama's actions, since "Obama, like so many leftist radicals, has a strong distaste for pre-Obama America."²¹⁰ While Bush seemed to encourage an intense public focus on his intentions more than Obama, it is safe to say that for both, we ought not fall completely into the darkness of their inner selves. To the degree that we pretend to know the hidden "self" of each behind the mask, we create a politics that ignores the world their policies are creating. This contemporary practice has a recent history based on the cultural, technological and media contexts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On many fronts, American politics today has been stripped of its public character and has focused on the inner private self to the detriment of politics.

Authenticity and the "Century of the Self"

Just as the ideal of the authentic self began with great hope with Rousseau and was destroyed (by its own logic) with the conformist phenomena of twentieth century mass society, so too was authenticity introduced as a virtue in the 1960s, only to be used as a conformist marketing tool by the end of the century. Like other social and political movements that have been discussed in this dissertation, the hippie movement of the 1960s saw the ideal of authenticity as a bedrock, yet the ideal became monopolized and utilized by the same forces it perceived as op-

²¹⁰ David Limbaugh, "Is Obama Intentionally Destroying America?" WND. July 09, 2012.

pressive. This rise and demise of authenticity from the 1960s onward is captured in the BBC documentary *Century of the Self*. The film details the high ideals of the New Left as it sought to fight the effects of perceived state oppression. Faced with the overwhelming power of the state, the narrator argues, “many in the New Left began to turn to a new idea: if it was impossible to get the policeman out of one’s head by overthrowing the state, instead one should find a way of getting inside one’s own mind and removing the controls implanted there by the state and the corporations. Out of this would come a new self and thus, a new society.” A collectivity of newly authentic selves would, in the aggregate, create a more authentic society. This new idea became the foundation, the film argues, of the Human Potential Movement, which was founded by psychotherapists who created the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. In group therapy meetings, individuals were encouraged, as Rousseau encouraged child-rearers to treat their children in *Emile* two centuries before, to express natural emotions that had been discouraged and suppressed in regular society. Expressing their “true inner selves” was a means towards self-recovery, creating “new autonomous beings, free of social conditioning.”

By the late 1960s, this ideal of autonomy and authenticity had spread. This began to concern corporate America, since “these new selves were not behaving as predictable consumers.” This changed the ways in which corporations began to sell products to Americans. As the narrator of *Century of the Self* notes, new customers “no longer wanted anything that would place them within the narrow strata of American society. Instead what they wanted were products that would express their individuality, their difference in a conformist world. Market researcher Daniel Yankelovich details in the film that “products have always had an emotional meaning. What was new was individuality; the idea that ‘this product expresses me.’” This logic then ap-

plied to cars, music and clothes. “Operating groups” were set up within corporations to try to discern how to appeal to new consumers seeking individual authenticity. One agency head wrote to his operating group: “We must conform to the new nonconformists. We must listen to the music of Bobby Dylan and go to the theatre more.”

Not only did corporate America began devising ways to reach these new consumers, but the consumers themselves were beginning to shed the political idealism that initially inspired this updated politics of authenticity, focusing instead on remaking themselves rather than the world; Rousseau’s radical individuality without the collectivist ideals. The film details new self-help movements, seminars, and ideas that began to emerge that, like the Human Potential Movement, attempted to strip away socially-implanted conformist tendencies. But unlike the HPM these new movements did so not to discover a core inner *goodness* of the self; that idea itself was too constricting. Instead, they sought to strip away every layer of the self until what was revealed inside was an ethically-neutral blank slate of nothingness and meaninglessness. From here, one could rebuild oneself and one’s reality in the world in an even more authentic, voluntary way. As the film describes it, “one of the original Yippie founders Jerry Rubin...was beginning to buy into the notion that he could be happy and fully self-developed on his own: socialism in one person...which of course is capitalism!” Having dropped the “inner goodness” side of the formula advocated by the Esalen Institute, self-help movements began to drop the “political” aspirations of the “personal is political” formulation that influenced so many political activists of the 1960s; an old idea that had been renewed. The Rousseauist project of rediscovering moral virtue in the heart of the natural individual, and then turning that individual virtue into collective justice, had lost out to the licentiousness of the 1970s, 80s and beyond in which the mere product preferences

of the ethically-neutral self became paramount. In this atmosphere, corporations, the hippie movement's original colonizers of the authentic self, had no problems creating and then fulfilling the desires of a more libertine consumer market. Like past attempts to create a more authentic society in which the self was equipped to resist manipulation, the movements of the 1960s simply created new avenues through which public manipulation could be exercised.

These new forms of corporate domination influenced the political world as well. The film goes on to detail the ways in which politicians in the 1980s and 90s have harnessed this new nexus of authenticity and corporate influence to win elections and public favor. Consumer research firms like Stanford Research Institute came up with new ways to categorize people, not based on traditional categories like race, age, or class, but by lifestyles that people adopted in order to express themselves. This new style of categorization became infused with political campaigns. Particularly, Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign tapped into this new style of individuality by focusing not on governmental problem-solving, but the new individualistic value of *choice*, a byproduct of the self-help movements of the 1960s and 70s. Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, the film argues, appealed to the "inner-directed" individuals that research firms had identified. According to Christine MacNulty, Program Manager of The SRI Values and Lifestyles Team from 1978-81, new consumers "were really concerned about being individuals, being individualistic. And so in the early stages [of the Reagan and Thatcher campaigns] when we were looking at the messages both Thatcher and Reagan were putting across, we said 'they are using words that will really appeal to a lot of the younger people, and particularly to the people who are moving toward self-actualization.' We call them the "inner-directed" people. A lot of our colleagues said 'that's absolutely ridiculous, because inner-directeds are very socially-

aware...they'll never vote conservative.' But we said 'if Thatcher and Reagan continue to appeal to them in this way, they really will.'"²¹¹

The Decline of Public Trust

At the same time that Americans began focusing more on remaking themselves than remaking the world, the American media began the decades-long endeavor of covering personal scandals in politics. Just as corporate America and its consumers turned "personal" so too did our judgments of political events and with it, our assessments of the "characters" of office-holders and candidates. While personality had always played a role in the assessment of public actors throughout American history, coverage of Richard Nixon's personality came to aid in disparaging trust in governmental figures for more than a generation. Princeton history professor Julian Zelizer argues that "[w]e still live in the era of Watergate." Ironically (since Nixon was a Republican), the Watergate scandal did more long-term damage to the Democratic Party than the Republican Party, since the Democrats favor a more energetic government to solve problems. Yet in a more general sense, it created distrust of governmental figures. We focus not on public problems but on public personalities. Zelizer argues:

The worst effect of Watergate is that it created a climate where Americans fundamentally don't trust their government. It is one thing to be suspicious, another to reject government altogether. Recent approval ratings for Congress tanked to 7% and for the President, 29%. This is part of the broader trend we have seen since the 1960s. It is extremely difficult for government to do its job or for voters to have the kind of faith in government, which is necessary for a healthy society.²¹²

²¹¹ Adam Curtis, "The Century of the Self." Vimeo.

²¹² Julian Zelizer, "Distrustful Americans Still Live in Age of Watergate." CNN. July 07, 2004.

While Robespierre created an atmosphere of terror in his politicizing of private moral corruption away from Revolutionary ideals, our own politics is, while not nearly as violent, dysfunctional. The public tends to aim its judgment and assess its solutions not at impersonal laws and institutions but at the unknowable inner intentions and characters of public actors.

Satire

As trust in governmental leaders steadily declined throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, journalists and news networks were not spared the public's wrath. Ironically, the media that was the very institution responsible for uncovering untruths of national leaders in the 1960s and 70s, came to be included in an ever-growing list of institutions in general that Americans distrusted. By the end of the twentieth century, an interesting phenomenon began to occur, especially among young, cynical news consumers: they began receiving news, analysis, and even beliefs and attitudes from satirical sources rather than from the traditional media.

The Daily Show began as a "fake news" program; a half an hour four nights a week that borrowed the format that had been used by Saturday Night Live's long-running "Weekend Update" and HBO's 1980s comedy show "Not Necessarily The News", in which humorous news stories were often invented. Beginning with host Craig Kilborn in 1996, most of the show's antics involved relatively light fare, since the news in the latter half of the peaceful, prosperous 1990s seems tame by today's measure (Bill Clinton's infidelity, George W Bush's mispronunciations, etc). Jon Stewart took over in 2001, and then the popularity of the show grew after Sep-

tember 11, 2001, and especially throughout the highly controversial Bush Presidency, until reaching peak viewership during an episode in 2008.²¹³

While important real world events brought more viewers to the Daily Show, what made Jon Stewart a cultural icon was not his comedic skills alone, but his knack for poignantly exposing the hypocrisy-as-inconsistency of political actors in government and commentators in the media. His biggest laughs and most viral videos have come from this practice. One of Stewart's favorite targets was Fox News. One such hypocrisy-as-inconsistency expose aired in May 2011, when Sean Hannity and other pundits at Fox News had been reporting on a White House invitation to a Chicago-based poet and rapper named Common, who was perceived to have had controversial lyrics about violence against the police. Stewart's story "Tone Def Poetry Jam" begins by showing Fox News pundits complaining about Common's lyrics. Stewart sarcastically asks, "Are we really doing this again? For this guy, Common? The guy from the Gap ads? [Shows picture of Common in a Gap ad]. The guy from the Queen Latifah rom-com? [Shows a movie poster of Common and Queen Latifah]. Elmo's friend? [Shows a picture of Common with Sesame Street's Elmo]. That's your misogynist, cop-acidal, black supremacist? Hey Fox News, have you told the people who work at foxnews.com yet?" Stewart then cuts to a video of a Fox News host interviewing Common on the Fox News website. He continues: "Well I guess that explains foxnews.com's slogan: 'Shh! Fox News Doesn't Realize we're here.'" After playing a clip of Hannity reading Common's lyrics that seem to promote cop-killing, Stewart then wryly observes, "if Fox News stands for anything, it is a zero tolerance policy for any individual who might have, or actually did write a song about cop killing." He then cuts to a Fox News anchor

²¹³ Leigh Holmwood, "Barack Obama Gives Daily Show Biggest Ever Audience." The Guardian. October 31, 2008.

showing footage of rapper Ice Tea, who performed the song “Cop Killer” in 1992, and wishing him a happy 52nd birthday. “Well that’s fine because Ice Tea is not celebrating his birthday with Obama.” The last jab taken is directly at Hannity, who interpreted Common’s lyrics as advocating for violence against President Bush: “Would [Hannity] be this concerned about a musician who used the same type of rhetoric of violence about President Obama?” He then cuts to Hannity speaking on his own show to a panel of guests, where he says: “If this was somebody who used the same type of rhetoric about violence against President Obama, I would be against it.” Satisfied, Stewart remarks, “Oh if only we had the tape...I mean, that would really make you look bad.” He then cuts to a tape of singer Ted Nugent holding a rifle on stage yelling “Hey Obama! You might want to suck on one of these punk! Obama, he’s a piece of sh*t. I told him to suck on my machine gun.” He then makes a similar remark toward Hillary Clinton. Finally, Stewart cuts to a clip of Hannity being asked if he disavowed Nugent’s comments, to which Hannity replies, “No, I like Ted Nugent, he’s a friend of mine.” Stewart looks at the camera concluding: “This isn’t even fun anymore.”²¹⁴

Stewart is holding Fox News and conservative media accountable to the same standard that Rousseau originally held bourgeois society: one ought not shape-shift and manipulate in order to serve one’s own interests (which, in the case of Fox News, are ideological). While entertaining and at some level, valid, the constant focus on hypocrisy is a signal that our politics has not recovered from its over emphasis on private intentions. Reporting on the legal-institutional bases for American political discourse; the spaces for politics that Arendt argued ought to exist

²¹⁴ Katla McGlynn, "Jon Stewart Slams Fox News, Sean Hannity For Hypocritical 'Common' Outrage (VIDEO)." The Huffington Post. May 12, 2011.

“outside” and “between” citizens, gets lost in the over-emphasis on individual psychology. As a result, *politics*, formally speaking, is lost.

Barack Obama: The Personal is Still (Not) Political

Barack Obama was elected in November 2008 on a promise of a new age of cooperative politics that would overcome the boomer-era conflicts from the 1960s. As many media commentators, Obama supporters and Obama himself sought to convey, Americans were inaugurating not simply a new president, but an era of honestly an truthfulness in politics after decades of political scandal in which the public costumes of office holders had been stripped away to reveal dark underlying motives and characters behind their actions. Rather than admitting that politics (including modern democratic politics since Machiavelli) always involves a certain level of white lies, half true public statements when dealing with ends-means calculation, and even outright deception, Obama’s supporters rejoiced in the prospect of truth-telling. In *The Washington Times*, Christopher Gergen and Gregg Vanourek, leaders of an entrepreneurial company that urges “authentic leadership” iterated the idea that Obama’s election was indicative of new voters who sought authenticity in their politics:

Mr. Obama’s appeal among rising generations is undeniable, and part of this appeal has been his authenticity. That has been one of his most lucrative political assets, in part because authenticity - or rather the quest for it - is one of the defining features of this moment in our history...Rising generations (especially Xers and Millennials) are known for seeking authenticity when it comes to their political candidates, relationships, hobbies, neighborhoods, communities and even consumer experiences - from their coffee elections to whether products are produced by ‘socially responsible’ businesses....Surely we have stomached too many scandals and disappointments in recent years - in government, the church, business, sports and beyond - to withstand the audacity of hope dashed by yet another

politician seduced by the siren song of ego or the machinations of political calculation.²¹⁵

As an inexperienced legislator only in Washington for two years (a talking point Obama often presented as a virtue in the anti-Washington atmosphere), Obama's own personal biography came to be a major selling point of his campaign. Obama's autobiographies spoke at length about his experiences as a multiracial, cosmopolitan public figure, having grown up in several different places with conflicting internal identities.²¹⁶ Obama projected these internal struggles onto his political vision: a left version of American exceptionalism focused on tolerance and diversity. While liberals had been arguing for diversity and tolerance in politics for years; it was Obama's personal embodiment of these values that brought him to prominence.

By a similar rubric of Rousseauist authenticity, Obama is judged by his detractors who cite his internal contradictions, often to the point of absurdity. Fox News has been a target of those on the left who point out its perceived hypocrisy. At the same time, it engages in this act just as much as anyone. In what was advertised as a "bombshell" story one month before the 2012 presidential reelection, Sean Hannity and Tucker Carlson played a video on Fox News that showed Obama speaking with different vocal inflections to different audiences with different racial and ethnic backgrounds. After highlighting the hypocritical and manipulative character of Obama, based on different speaking styles, Hannity brought Juan Williams on to play devil's advocate.

Hannity: Juan, does [Obama] sound the same as he did in Philadelphia in his speech on race, yes or no?

²¹⁵ Christopher Gergen and Gregg Vanourek. "GERGEN/VANOUREK: Obama's Authenticity Inspires." *Washington Times*. January 28, 2009.

²¹⁶ Barack Obama, *Dreams of My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Crown, 2004).

Williams: No!

Hannity: Why, then?

Williams: Why? Because he's speaking at Hampton University, he's speaking to an elite audience...

Hannity: Why does he speak differently to this group? Why differently?

Williams: He was relating to them directly! You just said...white politicians, black politicians, people do it in front of Jewish groups, they do it in front of Italian groups...

Hannity: And they change their accent, their cadence, their speaking style, they change everything?

___: No, they don't. Juan, Mitt Romney went to the NAACP and he spoke just as he did to any other audience.

Williams: Let me tell you something. Politicians do this repeatedly.

___: That's a dodge, Juan, an absolute dodge.

This did not turn out to be "a bombshell video...that could dramatically impact the race for the White House" as the advertisements for the *Hannity* episode exclaimed.²¹⁷ But it does show how an idea that is several hundred years old is still very much with us, and how it can become ludicrous in an age of mass media.

Theatricality in Contemporary Politics

Much as Thoreau monumentalized John Brown by equating him with Christ in order to shock his audience, political office-holders, office-seekers, social and political movements, and even non-political celebrities today must shock audiences in order to draw attention. While this might bring further attention and judgment on the shocker himself, in an Arendtian sense, it is supposed to bring attention away from the speaker and toward an issue that exists, as Arendt would say "outside of and between men." Thoreau, according to Jack Turner, was trying to get

²¹⁷ Mirkinson, Jack. "Sean Hannity's Obama 'Bombshell' Draws Yawns; Juan Williams Says He's 'Playing A Race Card' (VIDEO)." The Huffington Post. October 03, 2012.

his audience to pay attention to the gross moral injustice of slavery, not himself, nor to John Brown as an individual. This necessitates a reliance on shocking or disrupting the audience.

There have been several examples of this type of theatrical attempt at disruption or demonstration in recent years. Yet given the prevalence of the ideal of authenticity in American political culture, the public response is more often than not immediately aimed at the characters and personalities of the protesters. On Thursday, January 15, 2015 on Route 93 North heading into Boston, protesters from the Black Lives Matter group blocked rush hour morning traffic into the city by chaining themselves to barrels they had placed in the middle of the road. They were protesting in response to the acquittal of a police officer who shot a black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, MO in August of 2014. It took almost five hours for police to unchain them and remove them from the highway. One of the protesters said:

The reason why we're holding disruptions is to effect a larger scale of economic disruption. These entire systems of policing and judicial systems are untenable, and we're here to advocate strongly. I personally feel disruptions are powerful. I feel they can wake people up a little bit from their privilege and their insulation. I personally cannot understand why killing a black child is not enough for people to stop. So that's why we're here and that's why we're doing this.²¹⁸

Another protester stated that the protest was “necessary to disrupt a capitalist structure that has been built on the physical and economic exploitation of black bodies since our country’s inception.” As was discussed in the last chapter in the discussion on Iris Marion Young and “oppositional performative contestation”, this performative act was meant ultimately to bring attention to an issue through shock value and disruption, not to the persons performing the act.

²¹⁸ "Protesters Block Traffic on I-93 North and South of Boston," BostonGlobe.com. January 15, 2015.

The response from commuters and state officials was not as idealistic and certainly not based upon the political issue the protesters wished to have addressed. Police and commuters complained about blocking the flow of traffic (on a highway that is already infamous for traffic problems). Officials complained that it endangered lives because ambulances could not get through.²¹⁹ But most importantly for our purposes, in the immediate aftermath anyway, this is what the story was about. After the dust settled on issues of safety and inconvenience, conservative media turned not to the issue of black policing (even to offer a rebuttal to the group on the specific grievance they had over Michael Brown) but to the caricatures of the groups members as lazy, hypocritical hippies who inconvenienced hard working Bostonians. Gateway Pundit, a conservative blog, ran a story about reporters going to the homes of the protesters only to find “adult children playing revolutionary while living with their rich parents.” They described the attire of one of the protesters, Noah McKenna: “his hair braided in long dreadlocks...wearing gym shorts, sandals, and a zippered sweatshirt...looked and smelled like a dirty hippie.”²²⁰ Not surprisingly, the immediate reaction is to focus on the messenger of a political message, their motives, even their form of dress, rather than the issue itself which, in a more politicized culture, would exist “between and outside” of the individuals involved.

Since the election of Obama, we have also seen several theatrical displays from two quite different ideological camps: the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street. The very idea of revising the Tea Party initially sprang from a performative act. It began shortly after Obama’s first inauguration in January 2009. In February CNBC reporter Rick Santelli spoke out from the floor of the

²¹⁹ Peter Schworm, "Protesters Snarl Morning Commute on I-93 near Boston." BostonGlobe.com. January 15, 2015.

²²⁰ Kristinn Taylor, "White #BlackLivesMatter Boston Protesters Found Living with Parents in Luxury Mansions - The Gateway Pundit." The Gateway Pundit. January 18, 2015.

Chicago Board of Trade against Obama's plan to, as Santelli put it "subsidize the losers' mortgages." Santelli turned from the camera and asked the stockbrokers around him "how many of you want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage, who has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills?" After a chorus of boos, Santelli turned back to the camera and asked, "President Obama, are you listening?... We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm gonna start organizing it!"²²¹

Almost immediately, Santelli's words caught on and small, local "Tea Party" organizations began to sprout all over the country and immediately began employing theatrical tactics. Lodged in the minds of Tea Party activists and the media was the fact that the name itself was based on perhaps the most folkloric performance in American history: The Boston Tea Party. There, over 300 colonists from the Sons of Liberty masqueraded as Native Americans in protest upon a ship from the British East India Company. One of the first national Tea Party events to gain widespread national attention was on "Tax Day", April 15, 2009. Conservatives in several cities around the country, including Washington D.C. donned colonial garb and decorated themselves with Tea bags in order to protest spending policy — both proposed and enacted — by the Obama administration.²²²

Immediately, The Tea Party's theatrics instigated praise from conservatives and disdain from liberals. From both camps was an overemphasis not on the policy issues being raised but the personal characteristics of the membership. In *The Whites of their Eyes*, Jill Lepore mocks the Tea Party protesters both for their "anti-history", and for their anxiety over the first black

²²¹ Eric Etheridge, "Rick Santelli: Tea Party Time." Opinionator Rick Santelli Tea Party Time Comments. February 20, 2009.

²²² Liz Robbins, "Tax Day Is Met With Tea Parties." The New York Times. April 15, 2009, 2015.

president rather than real policy concerns. In short, the Tea Party movement was all theatre, and not, for Lepore, a serious political movements worthy of serious attention.²²³ House Speaker Nancy Pelosi branded the movement as “astroturf” because of the wealthy corporate donors she argued were bankrolling its operations.²²⁴ Liberal bloggers and commentators painted the membership as ignorant hillbillies who could not spell (a website called “Americans Against The Tea Party” had a blog post that simply listed 20 misspelled protest signs).²²⁵ Those on the right praised the movement on the same grounds: the personal characteristics of its membership. Rather than saying the movement was populated by ignoramuses, many conservatives praised its authenticity. Speaking at the 2010 Tea Party Convention in Nashville, TN, Sarah Palin said of the Tea Party: “It is just so inspiring to see real people — not inside the Beltway professionals — come out and stand up and speak out for common-sense conservative principles.”²²⁶

The Occupy Wall Street Movement began in September 2011 and based itself primarily in Zuccotti Park in New York City. While the movement began largely as a protest against the perceived excesses of Wall Street and the connected issue of economic inequality in the United States, it was immediately criticized by those on both the left and the right for lacking a clear agenda. Even more damning was the focus on the optics of the movement. The Washington

²²³ Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²²⁴ "Pelosi and the Tea Party 'Share Views'" ABC News. February 28, 2010.

²²⁵ "20 More Hysterical Misspelled Tea Party Signs! (Image Gallery)." Americans Against the Tea Party. July 07, 2013.

²²⁶ Sarah Palin, "Tea Party Convention Keynote Speech (complete Transcript Audio Video)." Sarah Palin - Tea Party Convention Keynote Speech (complete Transcript Audio Video). February 06, 2010.

Times mocked the protesters as “screwball hippies.”²²⁷ Glenn Beck’s *The Blaze* spoke of protesters in tie-dyed T-shirts and star-spangled underwear.²²⁸ A *New York Post* article interviewed people near the rallies who asked “how can anyone take them seriously? They look like homeless people” and charged “these people need a change of wardrobe and a shower.” The Post then focused the story on “the good laugh” the protesters provided to the “hardworking people gazing from their office window.”²²⁹ The narrative quickly became about how lazy and unkempt the protesters were, while the very real issue of economic inequality fell by the wayside.

Both the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street eventually became branded as harmful to their own ideological interests. This was based largely on the optics of each of the movements: the Tea Party for its bombast, its inability to compromise and for its perceived racism and ignorance, Occupy Wall Street for its aimlessness, its disruptions and the perception of it as a protest orchestrated by whiny, lazy kids with too much time on their hands. There are a plethora of articles written on the demise of each movement. Yet what commentators miss about theatrical politics is the fact that they are successful insofar as their impact last far beyond the involvement of the members themselves. An Arendtian notion of heroic political action is impersonal; it is not concerned with whether a given political act is fashionable years after its inception, nor with whether the members are personally lauded for their activism. While it is not popular or politically pragmatic to be a Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street member today, the policy impacts of their protests ought to be the focus of analysis. For the Tea Party, the impact is obvious: President Obama will

²²⁷ James S. Robbins, "TRR: Screwball Hippies Think the Marines Are Coming." *Washington Times*. October 01, 2011.

²²⁸ Billy Hallowell, "AP Analyzes 'Days of Rage': It's Unclear Exactly What the Demonstrators Want." *The Blaze*. October 01, 2011.

²²⁹ Frank Rosario, "OWS Bums Are a Big Joke." *New York Post*. May 02, 2012.

have spent the vast majority of his presidency having had an opposition in congress that was elected as a result of Tea Party passion in the midterm elections of 2010, at the height of the movement.²³⁰ For Occupy Wall Street, the results are mixed. Yet it is undeniable that the issue of economic inequality has become much more of a salient political issue in recent years. We saw this both immediately in Obama's rhetoric in his 2012 reelection campaign²³¹, we saw it in Obama's ability to raise taxes on top earners shortly after the campaign, and we've seen it in both the insurgent 2016 presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders and even in the rhetoric of some in the Republican Party who may never have discussed the issue just a few short years ago.²³² Thus, contemporary political analysis ought not simply to focus on the character of individual actors or movement members, but the long-term goals they impact.

Authenticity Today

American political culture's over-emphasis on authenticity of political actors is problematic; it brings our judgment away from issues we face and institutions we share and toward the dark, mysterious recesses of individual selves, which we are ill-equipped to judge. Yet authenticity remains as an ideal, but without a framework for how to define it or achieve it. In the 1950s, national, widely-read publications would feature covers and headlines investigating the nature of selfhood in an affluent society. The 1960s counter-culture movements and the self-help crazes

²³⁰ Jeffrey Jones, "Americans See Positive, Negative Effects of Tea Party Movement." Gallup.com. November 04, 2010.

²³¹ Greg Sargent, "Obama Unleashes Sharp Attack on Inequality, and Campaign 2012 Begins." Washington Post. December 06, 2011.

²³² Brendan Nyhan, "Why Republicans Are Suddenly Talking About Economic Inequality." The New York Times. February 13, 2015.

of the following decades gave many answers to those investigations, often either through providing spiritual resources for self-realization or through consumer products that were designed to make individuals feel unique. Several decades after the issue took on cultural and political importance in both popular culture and academia, why ought authenticity be an issue of concern once again? Has not the concept of authenticity become so subjective, so undefinable, and used for such shallow or even nefarious purposes that it ought not to concern us as a political goal, or even a goal against which to measure other modes of politics? Further, especially with the onslaught of social media, with its constantly growing options for identity presentation and its dominance by marketing interests, can modern men and women claim a unique, authentic self apart from their peers and the structures and institutions that serve as a venue for those peers? In other words, why authenticity, and why now?

It is precisely at this moment that authenticity becomes an even more pressing area of attention and study. Facebook and especially Twitter, for instance, have served as venues for organized political action, from the Arab Springs to The Tea Party to Occupy Wall Street. Since social capital theorists like Robert Putnam wrote about the ill effects of “technological transformation of leisure” two decades ago (namely, the passivity that pervaded American society after the invention of television), new technologies have resulted not in general passivity, but have generated *interactivity* instead.²³³ While this is an improvement for fans of a more interactive public, how much does it fulfill the participatory, democratic Enlightenment ideals of Rousseau or the counter culture ideas of the Esalen Institute? In other words, does contemporary social

²³³ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

media contribute to the formation of more autonomous selves, and do those autonomous selves then somehow remake the social or political world? While these questions are beyond the scope of this dissertation, further work in political theory should continue to consider the role of technology and social media on the authentic self and the performative self.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have advanced an argument that the best type of politics needs to find a middle ground between authenticity and performativity, which I find most evident in the politics and the self-practices of Henry David Thoreau. Moral, effective political action does not always mean saying exactly what one believes, nor does it always mean shielding one's true intentions. It does not mean being unconditionally compassionate to all of humanity, yet it also does not mean dealing with one's neighbors only through the prism of shared political processes and institutions, where legal citizenship is the only commonality. And it does not mean that we ought to be bound up as one tight-knit community in our political identities, but also that we are not completely opaque to one another and that bonds and coalitions can be formed from time to time around common ideological goals. Thoreau's political life in time shows us ways to incorporate the best of authenticity and theatricality. His philosophy on written communication transcends the gap between poetic-romantic authorship (which is meant to bring author and reader into a shared intimate space as the latter detects the intention of the former) and disengaged, distant authorship (in which the reader pays little attention to the author of the words and dissects the work itself). It is the view of this author that our political culture is disserved by those who hold political actors to absolute standards of authenticity (e.g. speaking in the same tone to all

audiences, or never criticizing another public figure for saying something one has said one's self). I take this view not only because it is such a lackadaisical way to engage in political disagreement, but that it degrades our humanness. All humans are, at points in time, hypocrites who hold different standards for different individuals, allowing some individuals to escape their moral judgment if they agree with their ideologies, and who change their minds, their voices, and their beliefs in different contexts. To say otherwise is to impose a totalitarian iron band around the fluctuations of democratic politics.

We can see in numerous examples that our political culture is still infused with the standard of authenticity-as-legitimacy, at least in the reporting and discussion of statements by public actors. We have seen throughout this dissertation both the conceptual and practical difficulties inherent in our overemphasis on scrutinizing the actor behind the act. Public judgment of private selves keeps the polis at a standstill; politics becomes nothing more than a debate over internal characters rather than as a space for citizen education, debate, and ultimately compromise on issues upon which we can disagree. At best, it is a symptom of a depoliticized mass society, at worst, a warning sign of an ever-possible totalitarian ideology. But the more difficult and somewhat unmeasurable question is whether theatrics can push us toward greater understanding and more elevated debate over difficult issues in the long run. A century from now, all of the members of the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, and Black Lives Matter, Barack Obama, George W Bush, Sean Hannity, Jon Stewart, and all the other movements and personalities of this era will be gone. Few will judge their characters as intensely and even fewer will be offended by their inner intentions. But toward what kind of public life and public policies that spring from that political culture will their actions have led? While Thoreau had been seen by many, especially in

academics, as an apolitical gadfly who did nothing to stop slavery, he is increasingly monumentalized a century and a half later as a great example of a conscientious citizen, one who lives to improve one's soul while finding occasional spaces to wake up his neighbors to their own inner consciences. The Enlightenment project has always been dedicated to mobilizing the public in fits and starts toward greater achievement of private individuality while directing public action in concert toward the solution of shared problems. Perhaps this combination can teach us something today as we seek to identify and rectify the next great moral issue together, apart, and alone with ourselves.

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