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Political Legitimacy and Self-Loss

by

Paul Scott Axelrod

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

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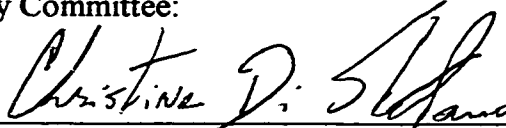
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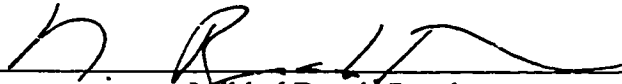
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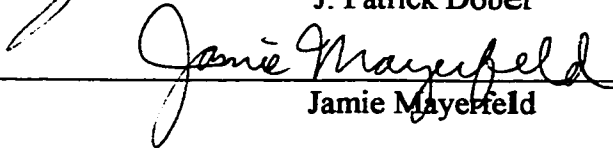
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Abstract

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND SELF-LOSS

by Paul Scott Axelrod

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In this dissertation I propose that we think of political legitimacy as arising not from the consent of autonomous political actors, but from experiences of assimilation, imitation and rapture, or what I call “self-loss.” Even though this is meant as a challenge to liberal theories of political legitimacy, I conclude that experiences of self-loss are not categorically opposed to liberal norms of autonomy in the spheres of consent and obligation. I see such experiences as part of a continuous movement between self-loss and self-assertion that is constitutive of autonomy, not hostile to it. In the first chapter, I propose incorporating experiences of self-loss into the theorization of political legitimacy by questioning the pertinence of modern rationalist and social-scientific accounts of legitimacy to the perspective of those for whom power is legitimate. I then proceed with three chapters in which I elucidate the affinities between ancient, early modern and contemporary conceptualizations of identity and power. My main interlocutors in this respect are Plato, Thomas Hobbes, and Judith Butler. With my comments on these authors, I advance the argument that the experience of power can become both meaningful and conducive to self-assertion even without presupposing the autonomy or consent of political actors. Through further readings of Plato, as well as of Herodotus and Xenophon, I explore philosophical, fictional and historical depictions of *techne*, which I interpret as the cunning exercise of self-assertion under the guise of self-effacement. In the final chapter, I posit the idea of assertive self-loss against contemporary fears about the effects of technology on political autonomy. I argue that technology presents less of a threat to autonomy and political legitimacy as much as a

way of being human that is capable of unexpected ways of asserting itself in the very course of becoming lost in the worlds of artifice that embrace it.

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Finally, I wish to thank my parents. It is not possible to express adequately the gratitude I feel for them for a lifetime of love and support. I dedicate this dissertation to them.

DEDICATION

The author wishes to dedicate this thesis to his parents, Daniel and Phyllis Axelrod.

INTRODUCTION

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND SELF-LOSS

The Delphic Imperative

According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “the single inscription on the Temple of Delphi contained a precept more difficult and more important than is to be found in all the huge volumes that moralists have ever written.”¹ I agree. Thus the title of this dissertation is meant to indicate not so much the equivalence of political legitimacy and self-loss, as much as to mark a disagreement with the view that we can make sense of what power is or ought to be without considering what it might mean to be a person. It is out of such a disagreement that this dissertation challenges the view that political legitimacy arises from the consent of autonomous and self-same political actors.

If in the subsequent chapters I give evidence of unwillingness to contain the concept of political legitimacy within abstract boundaries, it will not be inadvertently, but, led by the gnomic imperative to know myself, just as “a man plunged in his deepest reveries will lead you to water,” I allow the concept of political legitimacy to leak its contents into the sensuous reflecting pool of personhood.² Political legitimacy was my high land, self-loss is my dale. I shall come back to that in a moment. Also, as I point

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, trans. G. D. H. Cole, *Preface to A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, (London: Dent, 1983), p. 38.

² Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, (New York: Signet, 1955), Chapter One, p. 22.

out in Chapter One, the theme of political legitimacy is an old one, not just for political theorists but also for political science generally. And like all old questions, the question of political legitimacy sheds light in a number of directions. Accordingly, I present political legitimacy as a point of departure rather than as a closed concept to be subjected to systematic unraveling. Here there is less of the progression of an argument than the amplification in different discursive contexts of self-loss in the experience of power. In the Platonic context, for instance, self-loss circulates through a story about educating the young, a discussion on the nature of perception, an allegory for knowledge of absolute reality, a dialogue about the social repercussions of poetic recital, and criticism of dramatic representation and artistic production. In the case of Hobbes, self-loss encompasses the extent of his understanding of the movable nature of matter, the constitutive role of sense perception, and the affective basis of political obligation. I have also found self-loss to be surprisingly present both in the context of ancient Greek usages of the term *techne*, and in the context of our relationship with technology today. Self-loss thus probes into the whole of the physical and social world, from our technological entanglements to our political obligations. This dissertation describes self-loss as a way of being a person, not conclusively but suggestively: each chapter invites the reader to discover the capacity of self-loss to render the world meaningful in his or her own political and intellectual habits.

First, though, the reader is entitled to ask a number of questions. In what sense is this work an example of political theory? What does the present work endeavor to accomplish? How does this work differ from others in its family, what gives it its special

flavor, its personality, so to speak? What, to be oppressively programmatic about it, is my thesis? The five chapters of this dissertation revolve around two ideas. One is that a theory of political legitimacy should be able to represent the exercise of power as those for whom it is legitimate experience it. The other is that while we are accustomed to thinking of an experience as something that we have and that takes place within the sensory apparatus of the body, the very existence of experience indicates the fact that our bodies are also connected to the external worlds that surround them. In that connection, we individuals who have experiences depend on the world for providing the experiences that make us the individuals we are. Following Joan Scott and Judith Butler, we might say that experience establishes the prior existence of individuals, not because experience expresses the foundations of an individual's being or consciousness, but because experience comes from an originary assimilation, imitation, entrancement, seduction, rapture, in short, what I call "self-loss," with respect to the colorful, smelly and noisy—not to mention the plain, bland and quiet—materials that define the conditions of independent and autonomous existence.³

In the first chapter, I begin my argument for incorporating the experience of self-loss into the theorization of political legitimacy by questioning the foundational status of autonomy in the spheres of consent and cognition. Instead of positing autonomy and consent as the conceptual origins of political legitimacy, I suggest that autonomy and consent represent an attitude towards the exercise of power that is made possible when

³ Cf. Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991), p. 782; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford:

relations of power *make sense* to those who participate in them. That is, political legitimacy reflects an orientation towards power more than it describes a state of rule. My main interlocutors in this respect are John Locke and Thomas Kuhn, but in this chapter I also set the stage for questioning any foundational theory of political legitimacy through a discussion of the concept of authority in the thought of Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, and the authors of the *Federalist Papers*.

In the second and third chapters, I amplify the description of political legitimacy as an experience of self-loss, as a condition of the mind and body in rapture, rather than as the accordance of power with law or principle. These two chapters are commentaries on, respectively, the *Republic* of Plato and four works by Thomas Hobbes: *A Short Tract on First Principles*, *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, *De Corpore*, and *Leviathan*. In these two chapters, through an elucidation of the affinities between Platonic and Hobbesian political philosophy, I contend that the experience of power can become meaningful even in the absence of autonomy, consent, or a distinction between the identity and non-identity of political actors.

Taken in the sense of self-loss, it should be understood that political legitimacy offers no guarantee either of freedom or protection from power. On the contrary, such an interpretation of political legitimacy invites us to view political subjects as the sites of multiple and conflicting influences, impressions and manipulations in the realms of thought and feeling. This is the main conclusion of the second chapter, on Plato: "Self-Loss in the Image of Identity." In that chapter, the philosophical regime, in which every

person is the proprietor of his or her own being, paradoxically depends on self-loss in the form of seduction by and imitation of the ideal of singularity. At the same time, seduction and imitation are also the means by which the enemies of the ideal city, the poets and actors, achieve a state of inspiration and exert influence over their audiences. The message of Chapter Two is that self-loss is constitutive of both self-possession and entrancement, and that neither self-possession nor entrancement gets us closer to the foundational ground of selfhood. As opposed to representing a foundational truth about what it means to be human, the self-same individual is the effect of a seduction constitutive of singularity.

In the third chapter, I reveal the source of Thomas Hobbes' theorization of cognition and political sovereignty in the Platonic idea of self-loss and *mimesis*. Hobbes is widely considered as having inaugurated the modern, liberal conception of the self; the aim of this chapter is to show that even at the inception of modern liberal political thought, the experience of self-loss is vital.⁴ It becomes clear when we read Hobbesian artificiality in light of Platonic *mimesis* that artificiality amounts less to a juridical transfer of natural rights from individual subject to representative than to what Hobbes calls a "perpetual embrace" in which each member loses its identity in the other. Artificiality, in other words, is more than a matter of giving up something one possesses: it is Hobbes' way of conceptualizing identification through self-loss. And Hobbes' true achievement lies in his account of mimetic deindividuation or self-loss as the foundation of the modern state.

I explicate Hobbes' version of materialism as a philosophy of experience, whereby he describes sensation and imagination as states of rapture. Joining Hobbes' understanding of states and subjects as political artifices to his views on physical motion and his theory of the imagination, I demonstrate that political artifices, bodies in motion, and the imagination all fit within his elementary category of "that which has its being in another." More to the point, human beings are fundamentally self-lost: for me to be human is to touch, see, smell, hear, taste and cogitate upon a world that takes possession of me. I also show how Hobbes theorizes sovereignty in a representative commonwealth as a state of rapture in the minds and bodies of those who simultaneously comprise the sovereign people and are constituted by their own sovereignty. In Hobbes' discourse of political obligation, popular political sovereignty signifies a kind of being-in-another that fundamentally, though not foundationally, distinguishes human bodies from all other bodies in nature. Throughout Hobbes' works, ratiocination, understanding and discourse are all said to arise out of the originary operations of the imagination, of "phantasmes" and "apparitions" which constitute not just mental life but human experience *tout court*. And in *Leviathan*, Hobbesian political philosophy culminates in the assimilation of multiple human bodies to the singular, irresistible persona of the all-powerful sovereign. In a Hobbesian world, political legitimacy represents the experience of imitation, rapture and possession between subjects and the state. And so, far from supplanting the Platonic belief that the political body mimetically embraces the collected individuals who comprise it with a distinctively modern, contractual, theory in which the state is

⁴ My thanks to Gregg Miller for suggesting this phrasing of the way I read Hobbes.

conceived as the designated representative of the subjects' will, Hobbes' account of the phantasmic origins of sovereignty actually converges with the tradition from which he is said to depart.

In the fourth chapter, "Assertive Self-Effacements, Contemporary and Ancient," I show that far from merely pertaining to Platonic and Hobbesian philosophy, the idea of *mimesis* continues to be built into conceptions of the self in the political theories of the twentieth century. In the first part of the chapter, I consider Judith Butler's meditations on the production of identity in *The Psychic Life of Power*. I read this text in response to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of liberal individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These two works both establish *mimesis* as a theme in twentieth century political thought, though in quite different ways. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno deny legitimacy to liberal-bourgeois societies in an analysis that sees the mimetic production of liberal individuality only as an imprisoning and totalitarian endgame from which it is impossible to escape. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler also suggests that the social construction of individuality takes place as a kind of *mimesis*. What sets her apart from Horkheimer and Adorno is that she tries to identify potential sources of resistance to socialization from within the logic of mimetic power itself. Horkheimer and Adorno help us to see liberal individuality as an instrument and effect of social control, but they leave their dialectical analysis with the obliteration of the self in mass-produced clichés of consumer identity. Butler carries the dialectic to the point when mimetic self-loss produces an unanticipated moment of self-assertion. In her

analysis, the subject of *mimesis* goes through a moment of unexpected productivity while pursuing a course of action that is intended to be self-effacing.

It is precisely as a ruse whereby self-assertion is achieved through self-effacement that I then reinterpret the ancient Greek concept of *mimesis*, through a discussion of the affinities between that term and *techne*. My purpose in turning to ancient Greek sources is to move beyond the type of argument inspired by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that sees liberal individuality only as an instrument and effect of social control. What is missing from contemporary interpretations of liberalism that focus on its disciplinary and alienating effects is an awareness that alienation also creates possibilities for the dialectical emergence of new selves. This potential for interplay between merging and emerging bears a striking parallel to ancient Greek contexts in which *mimesis* is understood as a ruse whereby self-assertion is achieved through self-effacement. In precisely this sense, *mimesis* goes by the name of *techne* in the ancient Greek context. *Techne* is exemplified by Plato's Socrates and Ion, as well as by Xenophon's Cyrus and certain tricksters of ancient Greek mythology. Through readings of Plato's *Ion*, as well as Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, I explore philosophical, fictional and historical depictions of *techne*, wily and assertive self-effacement.

In the fifth chapter, "Technology and *Mimesis*, Political Legitimacy and Self-Loss," I return to the main question of the dissertation and show that it is possible, at least plausible, to derive a meaningful notion of political legitimacy from the experiences of self-loss, using the example of our ambiguous and tenuous relationship with technology as a "case study" of legitimate self-loss. I am skeptical of the view that our capacity for

political agency has atrophied because of our involvements with technology (and technology's involvements with us). Instead of fearing technology because it threatens to take something away from us (our voice, our decision-making power, our freedom), I think it would be much more profitable, not to mention imaginative, to find ways of feeling comfortable in a sphere of political action coextensive with technology, and no less multifaceted or open to possibilities because of it.

In the first section of the fifth chapter, in order to evoke a sense of technology as a world of artifacts in which human beings are inextricably and dynamically intertwined, I turn to the vocabularies of Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm. Such a view of technology I intend as an alternative to the perspective taken up by Horkheimer and Adorno. They present the dialectic of enlightenment as the unanticipated effect of *instrumental* technology. But the instrumentalist discourse of technology that Horkheimer and Adorno presuppose is misleading, because it fails to acknowledge the way in which human activities have always been thoroughly implicated in precisely those technologies that give us the power to act in the first place.

The thrust of the fifth chapter is to contest the instrumentalist discourse of power, along with the idea that technology must be controlled lest it turns its users into objects of instrumental control. Through a critical exchange with political theorists of technology such as Langdon Winner, and drawing support from Martin Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology," I use my discussion of *mimesis* and *techne* to present technology less as a threat to human life *qua* autonomy than as the polymorphic source for new ways of being polymorphically human. Feeling comfortable with technology

precisely for the fact that we live in and through it from birth until death, our sense of the possibilities for legitimacy might become as varied and as flexible as changing times are themselves. By merging with the artifacts that define our lives, we might emerge from them as beings that are indeed artificial, indeed we must, but perhaps we would do so in ways that could not have been predicted. With its proclivity for change, we might plausibly imagine technology as a shimmering source of new ways of making sense of the world, and as the location of self-assertion, not self-defeat.

Throughout the five chapters of this dissertation, I elucidate a concept of political legitimacy and political empowerment that is radically mimetic, in that it does not presuppose a distinction between nature and artifice, original and imitation, or mind and matter as normative categories of experience for political citizens. It is also a conception of legitimacy that is radically, if paradoxically, liberal: the more we recognize that there are no non-artificial frontiers of the self, the more difficult the task of providing ontological justifications for a tyranny over the body and mind in the name of “real” or “normal” human interests. By asserting that the self has no foundation not established through its multiple and effervescent interminglings with the world of artifacts that give it shape, we actually defend individual liberty from those who would have such liberty be represented in terms of merely authentic ways of being human.

The Political Implications of Self-Loss

I concede that one of the weak links in this approach may appear in my choice of texts in Chapters Two and Three: what have Plato and Hobbes to offer to a theory of

liberal and democratic political legitimacy? I believe that the hallmark of a democratic political theory lies in the concept of popular sovereignty, in the expectation that the political authority of elected officials and deliberative, executive and judicial institutions should reside in those who are ruled. In one form or another, Plato and Hobbes would understand this, since in their own ways they each say that the power concentrated in the collective arrangements of humans is never of any benefit as long as the exercise of such power does not reflect the feelings and desires of those who are ruled. Plato and Hobbes made the trip to Delphi, and reading them, one concludes that the human being is a feeling, sensual, thinking thing first, a reasoning thing second: and that it is impossible to separate the political from what is first in being human. Political authority has its source in those who are ruled because that is where power is felt. For neither of these philosophers, then, can there be blind obedience if we are to talk of legitimate government.

Still, with all this talk of self-loss, there may yet appear to be disturbing affinities between my point of view and political practices based on irrational experiences and perspectives on what it means to be human. Consider religio-political movements. Is it not in terms of self-loss, after all, that Sigmund Freud, in an appropriation of Gustave Le Bon's group psychology, tries to explain the "emotional tie" uniting a "community of believers"?

We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction...are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part

of a group. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will.⁵

As Roxanne L. Euben argues, however, sociological accounts of religious phenomena are quite often blind to the view of the world that actually accounts for the appeal of ethico-political visions.⁶ So while Le Bon's vision of the crowd is deeply disturbing, it explains nothing, since it is completely divorced from the believers' own experiences and understandings of the world. On the one hand, aiming to place the experience of power at the center of an account of political legitimacy, I am concerned to show that the basis of a legitimate political order need not presume the autonomy of political actors. In order to do justice to the experiences of power, it is sometimes necessary to think about political legitimacy in terms that might be viewed as illogical or illusory within a social-scientific or rationalist discourse. But on the other hand, I would treat a religio-political experience as just one of myriad ways of rendering life meaningful, no less a part of the plural and contested world of meanings that also produces adherents of liberalism or democracy, and no less valid for it. After all, to take experience as the starting point of an account of political legitimacy is not the same thing as to validate a particular experience as the authoritative ground for the truth of that account. The point is precisely to avoid relying on any primary categories of thought and

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1959), p. 11. In this passage, Freud is quoting directly from Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (1895).

⁶ Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 154. I am indebted to Euben's argument for thinking about how my own concerns in this dissertation might pertain to those for whom the liberal narrative of political legitimacy is not, shall we say, entrancing.

feeling that would occlude the variable nature of all experiences and habits of thought, whether religious or rationalist.⁷

Finally, it might still seem perverse to frame a theory of political legitimacy within a discourse of self-loss, and then to call the result a contribution to “liberal” political thought. For example, in her article “Autonomy in the Light of Difference,” Christine Di Stefano notes that the modern liberal concept of the self is permeated through with the “self-referential vocabulary of autonomy discourse,” and that liberal political theorists typically enlist such concepts as “self-possession, individuality, authenticity or self-selection, self-creation or self-determination, self-legislation...and responsibility for the self.”⁸ Referring to the work of Stephen Macedo, she shows how the principle of autonomy is fundamental to the liberal conception of the self “as an independent and reflexive rational chooser.” Self-loss, which connotes experiences of assimilation, seduction, entrancement, imitation, even self-annihilation, would appear to violate one of the core “virtues” of liberalism: the “active power of persons to shape who they are, to understand, control, and shape their desires...”⁹ To put it simply, is it not the case that in a liberal society, as Isaiah Berlin expresses it, “a frontier must be drawn

⁷ Cf. Scott, p. 780.

⁸ Christine Di Stefano, “Autonomy in the Light of Difference,” in Hirschmann, Nancy J., and Christine Di Stefano, eds. *Revisioning the Political: Feminist Reconstructions of Traditional Concepts in Western Political Theory*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 112, n.5, 100. In this quotation, Di Stefano cites Joel Feinberg, “Autonomy,” in John Christman, ed. *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

between the area of private life and that of public authority”?¹⁰ Defined in opposition to an external world that threatens to invade it, the autonomous liberal self is theorized as a circumscribed, individualized space containing the reason, liberty, and agency employed by a person in choosing his or her own ends.¹¹ Taking assimilation and seduction as among the core characteristics of the experience of legitimate power, the theorization of legitimacy in terms of self-loss seems to invite transgressions against the “frontiers of freedom.”¹²

At first, the concept of the self proposed in this dissertation appears to be diametrically opposed to Berlin’s model of the self: as the idea of autonomy seems to be opposed to the idea that “the real self [is] something wider than the individual... [that the real self is] a social ‘whole’ of which the individual is an element or aspect” (132). Meeting up against “the encroachments of public authority, [and] the mass hypnosis of custom or organized propaganda” (128), the liberal self runs the risk of *becoming* something other than itself: for instance, faced with the “positive doctrine of liberation by reason... I assimilate into my substance” whatever is “incapable of being otherwise in a rational society” (144). And so assimilated, and insofar as other people prove to be recalcitrant to my conception of rationality, “I must, if I can, impose my will on them too,

⁹ Di Stefano, p. 99. In this quotation, Di Stefano cites Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 225.

¹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 124.

¹¹ Cf. Di Stefano, p. 98.

¹² Berlin, p. 164.

‘mould’ them to my pattern, cast parts for them in my play” (146). Thus a free society is not only one where there are frontiers between the “area of private life and that of public authority.” More importantly, Berlin presses upon his audience the desire for barriers *separating us from each other*. Against the ideal of negative freedom, he raises the specter of the mob or *mobile vulgus* that threatens to absorb you and me in struggles of assimilation, hypnosis, “moulding,” and impersonation.

Yet despite the apparent opposition between the protected frontiers of the liberal self and the principle of self-loss, the real contradiction lies within the theorization of the liberal self in terms of what Thomas Dumm refers to as “the neutral space of negative freedom.” In his work by that name, Dumm shows that Berlin’s argument pulls in opposite directions by asserting that the neutral space within which one acts as a liberal individual is *both* a “natural” fact *and* that it is socially constructed, arising out of rules “so long and so widely accepted” that they have “entered into the very conception of what it means to be a normal human being.”¹³ That is, at the same time as Berlin puts forth individualized and private ideals of freedom as protections against the “certitude of higher values,” he also describes an individualistic conception of the self that reflects values whose “normality” and “naturalness” presumably precede the individual, and that reflect the “higher certitude” of “what it means to be a human being” (54-55).

In other words, Berlin commits a crime against his own principles when he says that for a society to be free, the exercise of political power must be governed by the

¹³ Thomas Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996), pp. 49, 54-55. The reference is to Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, p. 165.

principle that “there are frontiers, *not artificially drawn*, within which men should be inviolable.”¹⁴ Rather, my point is that it is precisely by recognizing that there are no *non-artificial* frontiers of the self, that we might protect ourselves from political terror in the name of “real” or “normal” human interests. By asserting that the self has no foundation not established through the unpredictable processes and struggles of people trying to figure out “who and how they are in the world,”¹⁵ we actually defend individual liberty from those who would have such liberty be represented in terms of authentic ways of being human. Paradoxically, it is because our humanity is always undergoing redefinition in the field of contestation and struggle that Berlin is right to warn us against any ideal of freedom that is based on a claim to eternal validity:

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altar of the great historical ideals.... This is the belief that...there is a final solution (167).

As Euben and Dumm make clear, analyses of the self in terms of the neutral space of negative freedom do not bring us closer to the experiences of “contestation” and “penetration” that define what it means to be a free human being:¹⁶ By conceptualizing the self as a neutral space “protected against the vicissitudes of political sovereignty” and beyond all contestation and struggle, “the illusion of a human being who exists beyond artifice” is thus reified and becomes available for inculcating into the very people it is

¹⁴ Berlin, p. 165. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ Dumm, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶ Euben, p. 4; Dumm, pp. 46, 54-55.

meant to protect.¹⁷ To repeat, it is after all precisely in order to prevent any single conception of reality from becoming imprinted into the substance of private individuality that Berlin argues for a negative conception of liberty. If, as he says, “conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self,” then negative freedom, the kind of freedom one finds in liberal societies, should be derived from a view of the self as something always in a state of flux, always “shifting,” always “a matter of argument, indeed of haggling...of infinite debate” (127, 124).

The theory of political legitimacy and self-loss put forward in this dissertation is thus consistent with a very liberal view of the self, insofar as the core of that self is understood in terms of infinite, continuous and unpredictable processes, struggles, haggling, penetrations, assimilations, counter-assimilations, rejections, capitulations, moldings and innovations regarding what it means to be a human. I imagine a society of truly liberal individuals governed by the principles of negative liberty as a picture of shimmering and iridescent human natures, as dazzling as they are artificial. Where I differ from the liberal view is over the equation of self-surrender and self-defeat,¹⁸ and over the idea that there are foundational, non-artificial frontiers that define human nature. Of course, these objections are not unrelated: by positing the self-same subject as the unequivocal ground of freedom, self-loss appears as the effect only of illiberal regimes,

¹⁷ Dumm, p. 55.

¹⁸ Cf. Berlin, p. 126.

rather than as the condition of possibility for autonomy and consent in liberal democratic societies.

CHAPTER ONE

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AS SELF-LOSS

A man was on his way to the gallows when he met another, who asked him: Where are you going, my friend? And the condemned man replied: I'm not going anywhere. They're taking me by force.¹⁹

Introduction

My initial concern in this chapter is to take modern rationalist accounts of political legitimacy to task for failing to provide an accurate picture of the experience of legitimate political power. First, I challenge modern social-scientific accounts of political legitimacy, in particular Max Weber's famous trichotomy of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal types of political authority. As a description of political legitimacy, I find Weber's analysis incapable of explaining the power of a legitimate regime from the point of view of those who obey and accept it. Then, also as part of my concern with the ability of rationalist discourses of power to provide an adequately accurate depiction of the experience of legitimate power, I bring the authors of *The Federalist Papers* into the discussion. I show that it is an unreflective disdain for crowds as the sites of protean madness that motivates them to emphasize "cool" reason in the formation of political opinion. Yet they emphasize reason at the expense of being able to

¹⁹ José Saramago, trans. Giovanni Pontiero, *Balthasar and Bluminda* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994).

give us a compelling picture of how respect for government and for each other would actually be experienced among the citizens of a legitimate democratic republic.

I then turn specifically to the theme of self-loss in the theorization of political legitimacy. My main interlocutors in this respect are John Locke and Thomas Kuhn. I find eloquent support for my cause in Locke's political and educational writings and in Kuhn's justly famous sociological interpretation of scientific knowledge. Particularly through an unorthodox reading of Locke, I question the foundational status of autonomy in the spheres of consent and cognition. My aim is not to discard autonomy altogether as a useful category for thinking about legitimacy, but rather to enhance purely descriptive and rationalist conceptualizations of it by contextualizing autonomy within experiences of assimilation and openness to external influence.

Away from a Social-Scientific Theory of Legitimacy

We are told that political legitimacy is the form taken by the exercise of power when it accords with law or principle.²⁰ Yet legitimacy is also a matter of esteem; those who exercise power with legitimacy are persuasive in a way that goes beyond mere legality. What is behind the respect due to the legitimate? To answer that question I will begin by saying that legitimacy entails the bestowal of prestige; not only that the exercise of political power agrees with law or principle, but especially that someone or something has granted legitimacy to those who exercise power. This orientation towards the concept combines the ancient, legalistic understanding of legitimacy with the medieval

²⁰ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Legitimacy," 2.

idea, which establishes the basis of legitimacy as a political phenomenon on the principle of consent.²¹ With the idea of consent, the medieval political philosophers make a real contribution to our grasp of the meaning of the term. For if the early moderns have taught us anything about political legitimacy, it would be the following: while legitimacy may refer to the condition of accordance with law or principle, what is crucial is that some authority *bestows* legitimacy to its object. No government is legitimate by definition; Hobbes would tell us that a politically legitimate regime “hath not being in itself.” What I propose is that political legitimacy “hath its being in another,” to be precise, as an experience in those who bestow such status upon it. Better: those who bestow legitimacy have their being in that bestowal. The purpose of the four chapters of this dissertation is to elucidate what that means.

My discussion of the nature of political legitimacy occupies the area of reflection where bestowal is understood to be the very essence of political legitimation: the bestowal of legitimacy amounting to a kind of self-discovery for the conferring authority through self-loss in the object of legitimation. Self-loss will go by various names: character, entrancement, sensory perception, possession, phantasm, conjecture, technology. In these concepts, I hope to explicate the “inner justification” of power, as a way of contending with one of the fundamental questions of political thought: what is the rightful basis of political obligation?

²¹ “The efficient power to establish or elect the ruler belongs to the legislator or the whole body of the citizens....such election or establishment is always to be made by the authority of the legislator, who, as we have very frequently said, is the whole body of

Trying to account for why people accept or reject particular governments is nothing new. Indeed, it became something of a hobbyhorse for many social scientists during the 1960's. One could easily summarize the gist of these attempts with the following "subjectivist" definitions of political legitimacy:²²

[Political legitimacy is] the *conviction* on the part of the member that it is right and proper...to accept and obey the authorities.²³

We may define political legitimacy as the quality of 'oughtness' that is perceived by the public to inhere in a political regime. That government is legitimate which is viewed as morally proper for a society.²⁴

By reflecting only the empirical aspect of the phenomenon of political legitimacy, these social-scientific explanations accomplish nothing more than to treat an act of evaluation as if it were a given fact. Committed to a rationalist epistemology, descriptive accounts of legitimacy inevitable fail to grasp the inherent power of the very convictions they describe.²⁵ Of course, there is something to the idea that the conferral of legitimate status upon a government arises out of the perceptions of those who "accept and obey" it. But the problem is precisely to grasp the legitimacy of a government from the point of view of those for whom it is legitimate, and not simply to describe it as the perception of

the citizens...." From *Defensor pacis* (1320-1324) by Marsilius of Padua, in Alan Gerwith, trans., *Defensor pacis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 61.

²² For the classification of the following view as "subjectivist," see J. G. Merquior, *Rousseau and Weber: Two studies in the theory of legitimacy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 4.

²³ David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 278.

²⁴ Richard M. Merelman, "Learning and legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* (Sept. 1966).

²⁵ Euben, p. 154.

an authoritative quality inhering in the regime itself. What we are looking for in the source of legitimacy is a tiny ferment in the womb of beliefs, something arising within the body, heart and brain, and that grows and flows towards whatever in the world it is a belief *in*.

In fact, we should hesitate to grant the philosophical label “subjectivist” to the preceding view. According to that view, the public perceives “oughtness” in the government under which they live because the values the public holds actually do inhere in the prevailing social conditions. That is, the public perceives “oughtness” and confers legitimacy to the exercise of political power simply because the public already embodies the status quo. As John Schaar points out in *Legitimacy and the Modern State*, when such definitions of political legitimacy are examined within the context of the larger works in which they appeared, it is evident that they theorize legitimacy “as a function of a system’s ability to persuade members of its own appropriateness.”²⁶ Such a regime would be just like a truly legitimate one, with the difference that instead of actually bestowing legitimacy, the public only enacts the behavioral equivalent of it, the dead image of belief: saying “I believe” is not the same as saying, “it appears to be so.” The latter, though referred to as belief, is only tacit consent, not conviction at all, and it is the opposite of bestowal. The convergence of government policies and individualized behavior patterns is no proof of political legitimacy: to paraphrase Pascal, there may be

²⁶ John Schaar, “Legitimacy and the Modern State,” in *Legitimacy and the Modern State* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1983), pp. 15-51.

no tumult, no revolution, yet it does not follow that there is legitimacy.²⁷ And Pascal is almost always misunderstood on just this point, thanks to Althusser's essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*:

Pascal says more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.'²⁸

In fact, the point is something else. What Pascal says is that it is pride not to submit to such "formalities," what Althusser calls "material practices"; it is also "superstitious" to put one's hopes in them.²⁹ While formalities produces an easy belief, and indeed one could quickly perceive in one's material practices proof of the "oughtness" of one's government, yet "faith is in the heart, and makes us not say *I know*, but *I believe*."³⁰ *Credo*, belief, in other words, is more than habit, custom, material practices, more than the embodiment of government policies and social value-patterns in the shape of individualized behavior patterns. It does not follow that because I obey, I therefore believe in what I am doing.

²⁷ "It is an astounding fact that no canonical writer has ever made use of nature to prove God. They all strive to make us believe in Him. David, Solomon, etc., have never said, 'There is no void, therefore there is a God.' ['Il n'y a point de vide, donc il y a un Dieu.'] They must have had more knowledge than the most learned people who came after them, and who have all made use of this argument. This is worthy of attention." Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1954), p. 1090.

²⁸ Louis Althusser, trans. Ben Brewster, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

²⁹ "C'est être superstitieux, de mettre son espérance dans les formalités; mais c'est être superbe, de ne vouloir s'y soumettre." Pascal, p. 1219.

³⁰ "...cette foi est dans le coeur, et fait dire non *scio*, mais *credo*." Pascal, p. 1220.

Of course, the notion that political legitimacy is somehow linked to the beliefs of those who obey—as opposed to the intrinsic qualities of the type of regime—was hardly a new thought in the 1960’s. The view that legitimacy relies in some way upon belief can trace its modern ancestry to Max Weber’s celebrated account of “legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence,” or “legitimations of domination” in traditional, charismatic and rational-legal forms of authority.³¹ Behind this trichotomy we find, once again, Pascal: “there are three sources of belief: reason, custom, inspiration.”³² With these three categories—rational-legality, tradition, and charisma—Weber appears to acknowledge the interior dimensions of political legitimacy, since he refers to the legitimations of domination as the “inner justifications” of the state (78). But in these expressions, Weber belies the truth of his own thought. Like Althusser, Weber’s theory of legitimacy is really a theory of domination: there is no explanation for why those who are dominated would have any feeling for legitimate power. The problem is that Weber does not sufficiently differentiate between the exercise of power and the authority that bestows legitimacy upon it. Weber’s theory subsumes the capacity to bestow legitimacy into the power of domination, and as a result, the beliefs of those who accept their political officials emanate not from them but instead are demanded by their leaders, customs, and bureaucracies. So despite his claim that when it comes to a charismatic leader, “men do not obey him by virtue of tradition or statute, but because they believe in

³¹ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in Gerth and Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 78-79.

³² “Il y a trois moyens de croire: la raison, la coutume, l’inspiration.” Pascal, p. 1223.

him,” the case is rather the opposite: the belief in a leader’s legitimacy arises out of the obedience of his followers. In other words, belief in a leader is due to the intrinsic qualities of the leader himself: “the devotion of his disciples, his followers, his personal party friends is oriented to his person and to its qualities” (79). In brief: the conferral of legitimacy to the leader has nothing to do with the believer and everything to do with the leader. Belief in a charismatic leader is an effect produced in the believer, or rather is extracted out of the ruled, which remains passive with respect to its own feelings of respect for the regime that governs it.

Moreover, even when Weber attributes a limited degree of activity to the conferring person, this person can hardly be said to be an authority bestowing prestige upon the exercise of power, in the modern sense of the word “authority.” Authority, as Hannah Arendt writes, “implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom,” and is that element which endows political structures with “durability, continuity, and permanence.”³³ According to Weber, by contrast, “it is understood that, in reality, obedience is determined by highly robust motives of fear and hope—fear of the vengeance of magical powers or of the power-holder, hope for reward in this work or in the beyond....” This is as far as we get with a concept of a prestige-bestowing authority in Weber’s explanation of the belief in political legitimacy. What is unclear is how behavior arising out of a quick utilitarian calculation—what will I suffer versus what will I gain—can be seen as more than the dead image of belief. In fact, there is no question

³³ Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), pp. 106, 127.

here at all of actually bestowing legitimacy upon rulers. Rather, according to Weber, so-called legitimacy is conferred by those who fear or hope with respect to some consequences in the face of what he calls “authority.” As a result of this twisted logic, those who rule are self-legitimizing, self-authorizing, and self-justifying, in that they acquire the status of legitimacy by forcing it out of the ruled, that is, by virtue of their ability to terrify or make good on promises of material or spiritual well-being.

The Federalist Papers: “Cool” Reason and the Passion of Abdera

As we read Weber’s conception of “legitimate domination,” it is difficult to grasp what followers have to do with political legitimacy, because leaders possess both power and authority. We are going to address the reverse situation now, the problem of *too much* belief, the excrescence of conviction, beginning with Arendt’s characterization of the French Revolution:

...when the men of the French Revolution said that all power resides in the people, they understood by power a ‘natural’ force whose source and origin lay outside the political realm, a force which in its very violence had been released by the revolution and like a hurricane had swept away all institutions of the *ancien régime*.³⁴

In this passage we can see clearly the idea that authority and power are combined in the same entity—not the leader, as with Weber’s theory of domination, but in the followers, that is, “the people,” whose authority is construed as a kind of portal between political institutions and the destabilizing and cataclysmic force of nature. At this extreme, legitimacy exists no more than at the other end of the pole; the problem is what

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 181.

Arendt approvingly notes in “the well-known arguments of the Founding Fathers against democratic government.” She cites their objection to:

the ‘turbulent’ nature of democracy, its instability—democracies ‘have in general been as short in their lives as violent in their death’—and the fickleness of its citizens, their lack of public spirit, their inclination to be swayed by public opinion and mass sentiments (81).

The paradox is that when the public possess both the authority to bestow legitimacy upon a government and the power of executing its laws, legitimation turns in on itself, short-circuits, and far from bestowing prestige upon the exercise of power, it turns into its opposite, a total lack of respect for any form of government. This argument, which can be found at the very core of American political thought, equates democracy with anarchy for the reason put forward by James Madison in *Federalist 55*, that “in all very numerous assemblies, of whatever characters composed, passion never fails to wrest the scepter from reason. Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”³⁵ Paradoxically, an excess of passion results in a decline in belief. Why is the *mobile vulgus* or “movable crowd” incapable of bestowing legitimacy upon its rulers? For one thing, according to Madison, under democratic conditions, the “fickleness” of democratic citizens makes their bestowal of legitimacy meaningless, if their “lack of public spirit” does not make it impossible; more importantly, though, in the *mobile vulgus* we have the awful specter of group madness, such as this case depicted by Thomas Hobbes:³⁶

³⁵ James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, (New York: NAL Penguin Inc.), p. 342.

³⁶ Hobbes’ anti-populism does not necessarily arise out of his reading of Thucydides, as is commonly assumed. Thucydides, for his own part, was of the opinion that when the

There was once a great conflux of people in *Abdera*, a City of the Greeks, at the acing of the Tragedy of *Andromeda*, upon an extreme hot day: whereupon a great many of the spectators falling into Fevers, had this accident from the heat, and from the Tragedy together, that they did nothing but pronounce iambics, with the names of *Perseus* and *Andromeda*;...and this madness was thought to proceed from the Passion imprinted by the Tragedy.³⁷

The effect of the “passions” on men and women gathered in theaters or assemblies is nothing less than protean, as Plato says, each one “twisting about this way and that,” literally a person not “in his senses,”³⁸ and behaving in the most undignified manner:

When they meet together, and the world sits down at an assembly, or in a court of law, or a theater, or a camp, or in any other popular resort, and there is a great uproar, and they praise some things which are being said or done, and blame other things, equally exaggerating both, shouting and clapping their hands, and the echo of the rocks and the place in which they are assembled redoubles the sound of the praise or blame....³⁹

For these kinds of reasons, Madison argues that “it is the reason, alone, of the public that ought to control and regulate the government”; that they should “exercise their reason coolly and freely”; that governments should be established with “deliberation and consent” (317, 319, 231). Where passions rule, beliefs are impossible. The function of republican institutions is to “cool” the passions of the people with the balm of representative assemblies. But as Arendt points out, it would be misleading to read

Athenians deposed the oligarchy in the twenty-first year of the Peloponnesian War and installed the assembly of five thousand as their new regime, they “enjoyed the best government that they ever did.” (Thucydides, *Historiae* (Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1991), 8.97.2.)

³⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p. 43.

³⁸ Plato, *Ion*, 541e8; 535d1-8.

Madison to mean that reason ought to regulate the government because it provides a transcendent basis for legitimate power: it is not the case that the bestowal of prestige to regimes ultimately rises up from the reason of those who obey (or, if somewhat vicariously, of their representatives). Rather, the point of instituting representative assemblies is to facilitate “the man-made public space or market-place which antiquity had known as the area where freedom appears and becomes visible to all.”⁴⁰ So crucial to her notion of political legitimacy, Arendt bases her conception of public freedom as the pluralization of opinions arising “wherever men communicate freely with one another and have the right to make their views public” (227). In this she supports herself with Madison’s argument against the “democratic” view that citizens who are free because they are equal “in their political rights” ought also to be “perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.”⁴¹ Arendt, for her part, describes the essence of legitimacy not in the establishment of foundational truths to guide policy, but instead in the multitude of opinions formed in a public space, the only “space where freedom can appear” (125). In the last analysis, because of “the necessity of all regimes, old and new, ‘to rest on opinion’” (228), not truth, the only real basis for the bestowal of legitimacy is the “process of open discussion and public debate” (268).

Arendt teaches us that the Federalists had no explicit philosophical interest in opposing the tradition of philosophy, which had until that time reduced the reputation of

³⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 492b4-c2.

⁴⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 124.

⁴¹ Madison, p. 81.

opinion to the opposite of truth, by reasserting the dignity of opinion in the hierarchy of human rational abilities (229). Nor did they consciously try to transcend the tradition-bound framework of the notion of freedom, which the medieval political philosophers had conceptualized in terms of freedom of the will, with the ideal of freedom of speech or the individual pursuit of particular life-goals. What the Federalists do share with the tradition is an extremely wary attitude towards the behavior of crowds, and their interpretation of republican freedom was meant to promote a concept of political legitimacy based on the popular expression of authority, while avoiding the risk of what they saw as undignified protean madness.

Under democratic conditions, when both the exercise and legitimation of political power originates in those who are ruled, the bestowal of legitimacy would seem to require some kind of mutual respect among those whose opinions are formed in a public space. For the Federalists, this respect could be fostered through the process of open and public discussion in legislative assemblies. But in general, if political legitimacy is a matter of bestowing prestige on those who exercise power, then political legitimation in a democracy ultimately amounts to the bestowal of prestige between citizens themselves, not just their representatives. This necessarily brings up the question of dignity, since prestige is not due to the undignified. Yet we are not talking about dignity in the tradition of Kant, for whom “the only object of respect is the law, and indeed only the law which

we impose on ourselves and yet recognize as necessary in itself.”⁴² For Kant, a person commands respect insofar as his or her speech and action conforms to this law, which is the categorical imperative. As an attitude towards other people, respect is commanded inasmuch as a person’s speech and action is rational, that is, can be universalized for all people acting in a like situation.

According to Arendt, however, what deserves respect according to the tradition established by the Federalists is not the universality, but the irreducible uniqueness, of each member of the public. This uniqueness is manifested by the pluralization of opinions putatively guaranteed by limiting discussion regarding the legitimacy of the execution of law to deliberative assemblies, as opposed to plebiscites.

When men exercise their reason coolly and freely on a variety of distinct questions, they inevitably fall into different opinions on some of them. When they are governed by a common passion, their opinions, if they are so to be called, will be the same.⁴³

In other words, what is dignified and thus worthy of respect in the citizens of a republic are their differences, their freedom is evident in nothing but their differences of opinion. Unanimity is the mark of servitude. In what kind of practice does respect consist for members of a public whose dignity lies in their irreducible differences, whose freedom is evidenced by the multiplicity of their opinions?

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 20-21, n.2. I would like to thank Gregg Miller for bringing this passage from Kant to my attention.

⁴³ Madison, p. 319.

Attentiveness to the putatively neutral space of negative freedom might prevent the pluralization of opinions from becoming the undignified madness of a *mobile vulgus*. But is attentiveness to another's personal space all that constitutes his or her dignity? I believe that the practical danger lies precisely in this attentiveness to and respect for difference. Where the bestowal of respect is due to those because of their differences, the danger is that an individual's opinion becomes only a particular example of yet another point of view, none of which possess any more validity than the others. He or she has the right to form an opinion, to define his or her own terms, to be different, but difference is never more than that—just another opinion. This is not respect, it is merely being polite. There is something missing from respect when it is due only to the inviolability of another's space and the irreducibility of his or her uniqueness. If respectfulness does not affirm that within another's difference and uniqueness there is a respectable *reality* completely different from one's own, and not just another point of view, then freedom of opinion simply amounts to the right to leave the public space behind and retreat into one of myriad private worlds. Taken in this light, so-called respect humiliates, and is the opposite of dignifying: your opinion is just your particular view, its reality extends no further than yourself. My opinion is just that, as well. Though the promise of theorizing public freedom as the pluralization of opinion was to validate a kind of democratic politics, the danger is that respect for different opinions simply because they are private will devolve into the humiliation of the political dignity of opinion, finally of my own opinion as well, since I would have to admit that it too is just another private thing.

To return to our main point. Legitimacy is a kind of respectability; it is that which makes governments and people worthy of respect. Yet even if respect includes a negating, inhibiting effect on our own behavior towards that which we respect, it should also possess a positive dimension, for to respect means to esteem, to value. The alternative to a conception of respect as attentiveness to another's person, to another's uniqueness and difference, is a willingness to get lost in the other person, an inclination to treat a different opinion as a different reality. An irreducible uniqueness, not an inaccessible difference. Where the bestowal of prestige is due to those who exercise power, and by those we mean us, you and me, the pluralization of opinion should be taken as a pluralization of realities. The other person is not just different, but is a different animal, a different reality, let us escape to that reality, let us believe in it. Of course, this means that he or she can escape into me, become affected by me, afflicted by me, as well. I am speaking of the willingness to get lost in one another.

At this point, I would like to change the mode of presentation for this discussion of political legitimacy. It seems that arguments in political thought generally proceed by alternating between making assertions and providing examples. I will take the latter course now, leaving the assertion of what is entailed by the bestowal of legitimacy, to a more indirect mode, in which the experience of bestowal is amplified in the interpretation of various works of political and social thought. In concluding this chapter, I exemplify the attitude of bestowal through short interpretations of two texts, John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, and Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. These texts have not been selected at random, but instead are presented to demonstrate

that political legitimacy is not only pertinent to the practice of “politics” (Locke), but that legitimacy is internal to the organization of social knowledge (Kuhn). Respect is not only to be directed towards governments and political officials: while it is certainly possible to rehabilitate afflictive human nature in the domain of governmental and legal power, it is perhaps more important to think about our capacity for respect and for conferring prestige *as a social phenomenon*, less a matter of “politics” but no less relevant to the “political.”

John Locke: Autonomy out of Self-Loss

In the *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke argues that any agreement among men to “enter into one Community, and make one Body Politick” ought to be binding only when such an agreement has arisen out of the “natural” condition of men to think for themselves about how to live, how to “dispose of their Possessions and Persons.” Political legitimacy, then, depends on an “original” moment of reflection, described as a state of nature wherein men might think and act “as they see fit”:

To understand Political Power right, and derive it from its Original, we must consider what State all Men are naturally in, and that is, a *State of perfect Freedom* to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions and Persons as they think fit....⁴⁴

There are, according to Locke, fixed principles that any man thinking for himself would act upon. And as is well known, these principles all revolve around the inviolability of the body and of private property:

⁴⁴ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 269.

The *State of Nature*, has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions (271).

At the same time, the very character of legitimate governmental regulation is to promote behavior whose habits of thought and behavior consist with the personal freedom to acquire and respect the sanctity of private property:

Political Power then I take to be a *Right* of making Laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties, for the Regulating and Preserving of Property, and of employing the force of the Community, in the Execution of such Laws, and in the defense of the Common-wealth from Foreign Injury, and all this only for the Publick Good (268).

Locke's argument that people ought to consent only to governments that comply with their interest in the preservation of property and person suggests that autonomy plays a central role in his political thought. But autonomy, understood as the personal freedom of humans "to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions and Persons as they think fit," has both natural and political intonations: the paradox of Locke's thought is that respect for persons and property arises both out of the natural practice of men in consultation with reason, and from the political practice of making laws that induce behavior consistent with the freedom to acquire and the virtue to respect the sanctity of private property. Locke's theory of political legitimacy rests upon the idea that people are able to act and think for themselves—but Locke's conception of autonomy is embedded in the paradoxical notion that autonomy can be produced by being influenced by an external force.

In the *Second Treatise*, then, it is with the concept of autonomy that we have an illustration of an individual whose innate orientation is to be open to influence by another, an orientation that precedes the bestowal of legitimacy upon the exercise of power, and which is the precondition for such a bestowal. And even taken in nature, Locke's conception of autonomy ends up having more to do with being open to the influence of another than with disposing of one's person and possessions "as one sees fit." That a person could have any natural, prepolitical dispositions—apart from the tendency to seek pleasure and avoid pain—would appear to contradict Locke's position in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where his view is that at birth, the mind is "as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas"; and in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, where he argues that morality is wholly the product of education.⁴⁵ This contradiction is only apparent, however, because what our innate tendencies consists of in the *Second Treatise* is precisely an absolute openness to being formed—not by human teachers, but by reason itself: "And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions." Before an individual acts with autonomy, he or she would already have taken reason and the law of nature, "the teacher of all Mankind," as a law of his or her own making. Prior to autonomy is the "power to be moved," as Hobbes would say, by the lessons of reason.

⁴⁵ John Locke, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 104; *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1996), §1.

In short, a sensitive reading of Locke's views on autonomy in the *Second Treatise* reveals another, counter-autonomous, dimension of legitimacy: the essential "malleability" of human nature.⁴⁶ All men, Locke asserts, are naturally in a "State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the Law of Nature," as well as being in a state of "Equality, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another...."⁴⁷ But when Locke says "freedom," he doesn't mean "a State of License...to destroy himself, or so much as any Creature in his Possession, but where some nobler use, than its bare Preservation calls for it" (270-271). In other words, the state of nature is not anomic, there are after all fixed principles that govern it. The law of nature circumscribes behavior in the state of nature.

According to usage in Locke's day, autonomy means "to make and live by one's own laws."⁴⁸ Locke avoids the normal usage of his time in describing the autonomy of people in the state of nature, arguing that in that state, people do not make their own laws—they just don't obey the law of any other person:

The *Natural Liberty* of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature or his Rule.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Cf. J. A. Passmore, "The Malleability of Man in Eighteenth-Century Thought," in Earl R. Wasserman, *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 21-46.

⁴⁷ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 269.

⁴⁸ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Autonomy."

⁴⁹ Locke, p. 283.

What then is to occupy the protected space created by freedom “from any Superior Power on Earth”? The answer is not that man takes dominion over himself in the space cleared by negative liberty. The point, precisely, is that man is not naturally under the authority of any man—including himself. On the contrary, in the state of nature, man lives by reason and the law of nature. Our question is: what makes that law worthy of respect to those who follow it? Do reason and the law of nature, which regulate freedom, issue from a self-legislating natural authority, or from the authority of another, an Other?

The answer lies somewhere in between. As Locke says, “we are *born Free*, as we are born Rational; not that we have actually the Exercise of either” (308)—that is, we are born *to* reason. When we are born, we start out on a path that leads towards reason, towards the freedom that is grounded on it, and the government that is grounded on that freedom. In Locke’s metaphor of reason as the “teacher of mankind,” we can see the openness with which one approaches the teacher describe the innate capacity for learning, not in the sense of memorizing rules, but in the sense of taking a lesson to heart, of believing in what the master says. In the *Essay*, we are told to beware of accepting knowledge without testing it against experience, since that would result only in “bare Belief,” not “perfect certainty.”⁵⁰ In the state of reflection upon one’s real interests, however, bare beliefs are appropriate: there is no testing reason or the law of nature against experience; in fact, to do so would imply that one was already reasonable. The validity of the law of nature lies in the logical consequences of natural equality, as well as

⁵⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 528.

the norms governing property relations extended to the relation between creator and creature:

For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are, made to last during his, not one anothers Pleasure.⁵¹

Locke says nothing about experience providing the proof of the law of nature's worthiness; indeed, the argument that all people are the creatures of an "infinitely wise Maker" presupposed the value of property that the law of nature is supposed to establish. What Locke presents here is nothing but an assertion made on authority: reason says you should respect private property. Locke's warning against taking anything on authority probably arises out of his suspicion of worldly masters: "as if honest, or bookish Men could not err; or Truth were to be established by the Vote of the Multitude."⁵² The "master" in the state of nature, however, is no man—hence its compatibility with autonomy—but is simply reason itself—which "teaches all Mankind."

Indeed, it is not the characteristic of isolated individuals to be so impressionable: it is the essence of human nature to believe what we are told without question. This is the view expressed when Locke describes the shared nature of all people in terms of the desire for recognition, affirmation, what he calls "love":

...my desire therefore to be loved of my equals in nature, as much as possibly may be, imposeth upon me a natural duty of bearing to them-

⁵¹ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 271.

⁵² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 718.

ward fully the like affection; from which relation of equality between ourselves and them that are as ourselves...no man is ignorant.⁵³

In other words, everyone knows that people do not want to come to their own conclusions about the most important things; we just want to be loved and shown by others that our desires are worth satisfying: “how should I look to have any part of my desire herein satisfied unless myself be careful to satisfy the like desire, which is undoubtedly in other men, being of one and the same nature?” (284) We have not traveled far from the piece of “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas,” in that not only is there no innate morality, but there is no innate sense of being good or bad either, except for what others tell us is good about us; what is innate is our capacity for having morality and self-awareness written onto the blank slate, not by our own hand of course, but the hands of others.

Autonomy occupies the foreground in the staging of Locke’s political thought; the further “back” we go towards the “original” of political power, the closer we arrive at a very significant lack of autonomy in man’s nature: his innate conformability to reason and the opinions of others. People are innately born “to reason”; from the get-go they have “a constant attention” to what is outside them: they are drawn to reason and respect for the law of nature in the same spirit that a child enters the world: “Children when they come first into it, are surrounded with a world of new things, which, by a constant solicitation of their senses, draw the mind constantly to them....”⁵⁴ This is no morally

⁵³ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 284.

⁵⁴ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 107-108.

neutral capacity for being impressed. It is of the essence of a person's moral nature to be open to belief: without their innate malleability, people would never adopt what is not a law of their own making—the law of nature—as the basis of their own autonomy.

Thomas Kuhn and The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: Why Things “Make Sense”

There is, according to Kuhn, in every field of study, a “divide between what the historian might call its prehistory as a science and its history proper.” Crossing this divide, as it were, marks a singular achievement that “proclaims a field a science.”⁵⁵ The passage from “prehistory” over to its “history proper” means that an uncoordinated, chaotic field of research finds a single model—its paradigm—to guide it and unify it. The “achievement” of a paradigm is that it attracts “an enduring group of adherents away from competing models of scientific activity” (10). Prior to the achievement of a paradigm, the field of research, if it can even be called that, is typified by “deep debates over legitimate methods, problems, and standards of solution, though these serve rather to define schools than to produce agreement” (47-48). This seems to represent a political achievement as well, on the order of a Hobbesian transformation of the state of nature into a state of civil society. The pre-paradigm period is thus without order both epistemologically and politically, as can be seen in Kuhn's observation that in this period, researchers are more concerned to differentiate themselves from, and to establish influence over, each other than to arrive at mutual understanding. Just as a society

without a state is alleged to be deficient in some way, a field of research without a paradigm is not a proper science.⁵⁶ And a scientist without a paradigm is not doing anything that can be recognized as “science.”

This historian’s perspective is particularly well adapted for making the distinction between science and pre-science, since what it is that cannot be without a paradigm is a recognizable historical development. The paradigm is not only a guide for members of the scientific community, but it also enables the historian to determine how a field of research is doing, whether it is “doing” anything at all. But the paradigm only makes the scientific community’s work coherent to the scientist *qua* historian and philosopher of science. In other words, for a field of research to leave its prehistoric stage and to cross over to the properly scientific, historical, paradigmatic period; that is, in order for scientists to be real scientists, they must stop being only scientists and start being historians and philosophers as well. In their acceptance of a single model of scientificity, scientists look not only at their work but also at themselves differently, if only in a tacit or implicit way.

The achievement of scientific status (the scientists’ identification with a single community of research) depends upon a qualitative change within the scientist’s self-perception, self-awareness, and self-understanding. This change is the ultimate basis upon which common identification is possible, upon which shared meanings are possible

⁵⁵ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 21.

⁵⁶ Cf. Pierre Clastres, trans. Robert Hurley, *Society Against the State* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 189-218.

for a group of would-be members of a community. This change is the basis upon which their work becomes collectively meaningful. And this change is the basis for the legitimate order of rules and practices that guide the community of researchers. Without a transformation in self-consciousness, there can be no paradigmatic research, because the paradigm must be real for the researcher himself or herself. But such a change also amounts to seeing oneself through the eyes of the historian/philosopher/investigator. Is the historian of science a secret legislator of scientific communities? And if so, what accounts for the pre-scientific researcher's adaptation to the reality of a new paradigm?

Kuhn's position is that the historian of science is able to see what the ordinary scientist does not, yet that the discovery of paradigms is not in the first place a tool for historians to make sense of science. Instead, it is also what scientists use to make sense of their own work, albeit in an implicit or tacit manner. History, according to Kuhn, is really what's going on, and historiography is just a way of recording it. "Historical studies suggest the possibility of a new image of science," but this image is not a rationalization on the part of the historian. That is, even though Kuhn claims to be aiming at a "conceptual transformation," "a decisive transformation in the image of science," it is not the historian but history itself that makes science what it is. The new historiographers, "rather than seeking the permanent contributions of an older science to our present vantage... attempt to display the historical integrity of that science in its own time" (3).

So it is not the old humanistic ideal of an individual scientist projecting meaning outwards from his or her own autonomous and self-generating center. Or the Weberian

ideal-type of a charismatic leader imposing his vision on a group of passively suggestible followers. In other words, nobody imposes meaning upon the community he or she is studying; this is not a matter of domination or tyranny by a creative genius. It is not the notion of man as a god who creates his own values. What we have here is a hermeneutic, a discovery of the source of meaning in structure or system because the explorer is open to the unexpected. In the relation between oneself and others and the structures that are already in place, directing and regulating scientific conduct, the center of gravity for the discovery of meaning is shifted outward, to the paradigm. For the paradigm to be meaningful, meaning must be discovered in this openness or shifting of gravity, not in the fixed gravity of a subject looking out upon the universe. One must see oneself in structure, or rather go through it, in relation to it.

It is just such a historiography that prevents Kuhn's philosophy of science from relying on a one-sided transcendental concept of scientificity. Even though historical entities—in particular, the paradigm—define a field of research as a “proper science,” and display the integrity of science, there are no transcendent subjects of scientific history. There is no overarching paradigmatic relation to God, the cosmos, nature, or anything else, which would result in the birth of a universal god-man, political man, scientific man. Kuhn's paradigms are not transcendents. They consist of past experiences, of exemplary but strictly material practices. The validity of the paradigm is firmly rooted in the experiences of the researcher. The paradigm of a scientific community is a “concrete scientific achievement” that is “prior to the various concepts, laws, theories, and points of view that may be abstracted from it” (11). So while the

scientist who works within the guidelines of a particular paradigm may have achieved a degree of scientificity as compared with the pre-paradigmatic scientist, he or she is no more of a scientist than any other scientist working within the framework of any other paradigm, past, present or future.

What may be shared across time, however, is the structure and significance of the *relationship* between a researcher and his or her paradigmatic presuppositions. The concept of a relationship between researcher and paradigm might exemplify the idea of legitimacy, the relation between believer and that in which one believes, the inner ferment and outward departure of beliefs. Beliefs, not knowledge. Kuhn's problem, of course, is not how a researcher can achieve true knowledge of reality. The problem for Kuhn, rather, is what makes knowledge scientific, properly speaking. And again, the notion of a "science proper" is not a matter of true knowledge of reality—it is a sociological, political matter: it has to do with how multiple practitioners organize and regulate themselves and share commitments so that their work contributes to the development of a single organism, the collective body that defines them as members of a professional group. "Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, i.e., for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition" (7).

In other words, for a science to be "science proper," for it to be "normal," that is, for science to make sense to the scientist (we could say: for politics to be legitimate, for it to be normal, for it to accord to standards, for it to make sense to the subject-citizen), it

must be guided by a paradigm, the function of which is to establish shared commitments to rules and standards for the groups of researchers who might make up a scientific community. Paradigm-based science means “research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation of its further practice” (10). The concept of a paradigm does not contribute to a transcendental history, since there is no overarching coherence to the sequence of particular research traditions over time. Instead, the paradigm represents a kind of inner dimension of political subjectivity: paradigm-based research represents the researcher’s cognitive structure when he or she practices within the framework of a community’s shared commitments. What we can take from the theory of paradigms is an instance of the openness required for respect between individuals, understanding respect as the practice of getting lost in new worlds, escaping to a different reality.

Conceptually, the paradigm is prior to the interpretation of phenomena in that “normal research is predicated on the assumption that the research community knows what the world is like” (5). Prior to any research that can be called scientific, the researcher must share a set of commitments with other researchers. “These commitments provide rules that tell the practitioner what both the world and his science are like, so that he can concentrate with assurance upon the esoteric problems that these rules and existing knowledge define for him” (41). The shared commitments about the world provide the ultimate framework for taking the standards of conduct that define “normal science” as true and the activity of the legitimate research community as realistic.

The researchers' conceptual commitments involve assumptions about the "nature of acceptable solutions" to research problems as well as "the steps by which they are to be obtained" (38). There are also "higher level, quasi-metaphysical commitments," no less essential to the smooth functioning of scientific research, which include assumptions about the basic constitution of the universe, and even the commitment to the belief that the universe is capable of being understood and scrutinized (40-41). "Effective theoretical research, let alone empirical research, scarcely begins before a community thinks it has acquired firm answers to questions like the following: what are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses? What questions may legitimately be asked about such entities and what techniques employed in seeking solutions?" (4)

These commitments add up to a conceptual "box" into which the phenomena of scientific activity are forced. That the paradigmatic box is conceptually prior to the interpretation of phenomena is apparent in the realization that phenomena that "will not fit the box often are not seen at all. Normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies" (24). The paradigm restricts the vision of the researcher; it limits what the researcher will interpret to those phenomena that the paradigm leads him or her to expect seeing. But without the paradigm, there could be no interpretation of phenomena, since the paradigm is prior to the researcher's vision of the world of phenomena.

Kuhn's concept of a paradigm is not the usual one found in established usage: "an accepted model or pattern." In the standard application, the paradigm functions by

permitting the replication of examples any one of which could in principle serve to replace it. In science, a paradigm is rarely an object for replication, except in formal training. Nevertheless, Kuhn states that the “various research problems that arise within a single normal-scientific tradition satisfy not some explicit or even some fully discoverable set of rules and assumptions that gives the tradition its character and its hold upon the scientific mind. Instead they may relate by resemblance and by modeling to one or another part of the scientific corpus which the community in question already recognizes as among its established achievements” (45). So the paradigm contributes to the legitimation of further research problems by allowing the researcher to “recognize” in further research problems the character of what has already been established—i.e., “normal science.”

By contrast, the foundational moment of science, the foundation of a scientific community, rests on the moment when something new is “discovered.” That is, a discovery in the true sense means to find something that was not expected, that does not appear to resemble the originary paradigm. This, most significantly, involves not only recognizing what something is, but prior to that, recognizing *that* it is (55). Kuhn is correct to point out that this phrase, “to discover,” is misleading. It misleads by suggesting that the foundational act of a new scientific community is a singular act “assimilable to our usual (and also questionable) concept of seeing.” To discover, like to see or to touch, cannot be attributable to any single individual and any single moment in time. Discovery, seeing, touching, these all presuppose a commitment to a set of assumptions about what can be discovered, seen, or felt. These commitments do not

belong to any single person or time, but instead involve an “extended, though not necessarily long, process of conceptual assimilation” (56). The perceiving faculty of the researcher must have been “assimilated” to a broad range of prior assumptions before he or she will be able to discover anything “new.”

Summary

In this chapter, I have put rationalist accounts of political legitimacy into question by arguing that they fail to provide an accurate picture of legitimacy from the point of view of those who experience power. Modern social-scientific accounts of political legitimacy owe little in their explanations of political legitimacy to the experiences of power that actually give rise to the bestowal of legitimacy. In particular, as a description of political legitimacy, I find Max Weber’s famous trichotomy of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal types of political authority to offer a particularly weak explanation for the appeal of a legitimate regime from the point of view of those who obey and accept it.

Also as part of my concern with the ability of rationalist discourses of power to provide an adequately accurate depiction of the experience of legitimate power, I bring the authors of *The Federalist Papers* into the discussion. I show that their motivation in emphasizing “cool” reason in the formation of political opinion seems to lie in a robust diffidence to crowds, which they imagine as incubators of protean madness.

Nevertheless, the Federalists promote the role of *reason* to the detriment of representing the fundamental part played by *respect* among the citizens of a legitimate democratic republic.

Finally, I direct my attention to ways that self-loss is thematized by John Locke and Thomas Kuhn. Through Locke's political and educational writings and in Kuhn's sociological interpretation of scientific knowledge, I think a persuasive case can be made for the rehabilitation of self-loss into the theorization of political legitimacy. Particularly through my reading of Locke, which admittedly runs against the grain of a narrowly liberal interpretation, I problematize the foundational status of autonomy in the spheres of consent and cognition. By weaving the concept of autonomy into themes of assimilation and influence in Locke's writings, I hope that I will not be accused of throwing autonomy into the dustbin of political theory, but rather to have given much-needed nuance to a purely descriptive and rationalist conceptualizations of it.

In an appropriation of Kuhn's work, I suggest that the basic condition for obedience under conditions of political legitimacy is the "assimilability" of subjects to an as-yet-unknown world. The world makes sense to me, not only because I expect it to make sense, but also because I am open to the possibility that it will make sense. There is a long distance between a rigid expectation, which forms a picture of what things are like before we even open our eyes and ears, and assimilability, which has no picture, but is only a capacity for affliction. To repeat the words of Locke, and to anticipate the discussions of Plato and Hobbes in the next chapters:

Children, when they come first into it, are surrounded with a world of new things, which, by a constant solicitation of their senses, draw the mind constantly to them, forward to take notice of new, and apt to be delighted with the variety of changing Objects.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.1.8.

What if, no longer children, we are adults whose character is nevertheless still a page written upon, and not just upon but *in*? What are the experiences of openness to new realities, so crucial to respect, the bestowal of prestige, the ability to believe and get lost in others? The question, finally, is what it means for a person to become embedded within a universe of influence, of pull and of push, so that the exercise of power may be an experience that makes sense?

In the next chapter, on the basis of a close textual analysis of Plato's *Republic*, I discuss that question through what I call Plato's "impressionization" of the self. Plato establishes a constitutive relation of self-loss to human identity; the legitimate Platonic state, which depends on the individuation of the social body into citizens who speak for themselves and who occupy distinct economic and political class positions, also depends on a constitutive moment of selflessness and total loss of identity in its subjects. Far from representing the accordance of political rule with universal and unchanging philosophical standards, Platonic political legitimacy actually describes the effect of power when it is experienced as assimilation, imitation, entrancement, seduction, rapture, in short, what I call self-loss in the image of individualized identity.

CHAPTER TWO

SELF-LOSS IN THE IMAGE OF IDENTITY

In the best city in speech, simple narration and imitation collapse into one die. Education sets out to produce the integral self—no one can be anyone else—and ends up by producing the collective self: each one is everyone else.⁵⁸

You are a sculptor, Socrates, and have made statues of our governors faultless in beauty....Enough then of the perfect State, and of the man who bears its image....⁵⁹

Introduction

Far from living up to his reputation as the philosopher of indestructible individuality, of the citizen who speaks and acts in his own person, Plato's real achievement in the *Republic* is what I call the "impressionization" of the self. A close reading of the text reveals that before establishing the archetypal region of unchanging truth as the ruling and form-giving ideal of both the political body and its constituent members, Plato had first defined the idea of a person as a sea of personalities, as an embodiment of phantasms and floating images susceptible to anchoring in the singularity

⁵⁸ Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁵⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 540c-541b. All passages from Plato cite John Burnet's edition of *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). The translations are based on comparisons between the English versions of G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve

of philosophical self-knowledge. That apotheosis of Platonic philosophy, the singular self which speaks in its own voice, the citizen who occupies his or her own place in the society and class structure of the cherished community, indeed the very notion of political legitimacy itself, all that arises out of and does not exist without a prior theoretical explosion of the idea of a person into unbounded multiple personality. Plato's argument for hierarchy and social control takes place against the figure of the impressionistic self, but this self-without-boundaries also remains integral to the singularity of the ideal citizen of the legitimate state in surprising ways. In particular, the achievement of the ideal citizen's singularity takes place by means that are identical in Plato's vocabulary to the process by which people are said to lose their definition and become immersed in the world of phantasms in the first place. Paradoxically, the legitimate state, which depends on the individuation of the social body into citizens who speak for themselves and who occupy distinct economic and political class positions, also depends on an originary moment of selflessness and total loss of identity.

This chapter thus belongs to the larger aim of the dissertation, which is to rehabilitate self-loss to its proper place within the thematization of consent and political legitimacy. Even as the individual is thought of as the location of affinity towards the government that depends on each of its citizens' consent for its legitimacy, selflessness is ultimately what makes political legitimacy conceivable. Individual consent does not take place in circumstances that are so much opposed to self-loss. Instead, citizenship is one

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1920), and my own.

type of selflessness. What we learn from a close reading of Plato's *Republic* is the paradox that the consenting citizens of a liberal democracy are possible only because self-loss in the image of individualized identity is also possible.

The Platonic Revolution

What do we gain from reading Plato's *Republic* through Kant's eyes? Plato's great contribution to the theorization of political power involves what Kant described as his "flight from the ectypal mode of reflection upon the physical world-order to the architectonic ordering of it."⁶⁰ The key concept here is "ectype," meaning an impression, a copy, or reproduction. In other words, Plato rejected the impressionistic evidence of his senses, which produced only copies or reproductions of reality, in favor of the evidence of what he called "ideas," which are the "archetypes of the things themselves." So first of all, Kant is instructive in that by describing Platonic political philosophy as a flight from ectype to archetype, he identifies the larger significance of Plato's construction of the ideal *polis* in the *Republic*: it amounts to the construction of an entire universe of values and meanings that cannot be reduced to, or explained in reference to, the domain of purely sensuous, impressionistic, ectypal, experience.

In the archetypal universe of values and meanings, political philosophy constructs a dimension that is different from that of the sensuous life-world, which is situated within causal networks and cycles of generation and destruction—for while the universe of

⁶⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1958). This and the following selections from *Transcendental Dialectic*, Book I, Section I, "Ideas in General," A313-A320.

Platonic political philosophy is obviously not unconcerned with the world of sensuous life-experience, it is in itself unchanging and deathless. According to Kant, Plato's archetypes refer to "something which not only can never be borrowed from the senses but far surpasses even the concepts of understanding...inasmuch as in experience nothing is ever to be met with that is coincident with [the idea or archetype of a thing]." And while nobody ever received protection from the sun or rain under the shelter of ideas, they "must be recognized as having their own reality, and are by no means mere fictions of the brain." Yet the point is, secondly, that if Plato determines the shape of a non-empirical, ideal architecture for the world and the human communities that inhabit it, what also comes through from Kant's reading of the Platonic "flight from the ectypal mode of reflecting upon the physical world-order" is that it represents a radical shift away from a purely reflective attitude before the world, towards an engaged, political, in a word, "architectonic," *ordering of it*.

And thirdly, if what we get from Kant's reading of Plato is the exact location of the *politics* of Plato's philosophy, this is significant insofar as today, students of Plato still live in the shadow of Kant's reading. According to more recent commentators, Plato "invented an imaginary space, a domain of perfect things or referents, on the basis of which he could then judge (or demonstrate in dialogues) the adequacies of conversations purporting to treat both questions of individual propriety and the value and meaning of

collective arrangements.”⁶¹ That is another way of describing Plato’s “flight from ectype to archetype”—and yet, is it not the case that if Plato did accomplish such a goal, a more fundamental achievement had already taken place?

The final point I would like to make about the “flight from the ectypal” is that it represents another, more subtle and no less constructive event in the history of political thought. Even though Kant believed that Plato’s “flight from the ectypal mode of reflecting” was “a necessary idea, one which must be taken as fundamental not only in first projecting a constitution but in all its laws,” and “an enterprise which calls for respect and imitation,” something crucial is missing from Kant’s emphasis on the archetypal dimension. In fact, Plato’s great achievement is not limited to the invention of “an imaginary domain of perfect things,” that is, his political accomplishment is not to be limited to the architectonic ordering of the world. Instead, the real achievement must be understood in terms of the ectype: the world as copy, as reproduction, as impression. Before any flight to the region of archetypes ever occurred, Plato had subjected the world to a thorough “impressionization.”

Plato’s real accomplishment is not the invention of the world of perfect and immutable archetypes. It is rather the invention of the ectypal world, that is, the world *as* impression, copy, and reproduction. I say that this is an accomplishment because it involves more than positing the world of mere appearances against a presupposed world of reality. Instead, it is the other way around: what we have in Platonic political

⁶¹ Michael Shapiro, “Language and Power: The Spaces of Critical Interpretation” in Richard Merelman, *Language, symbolism, and politics* (Boulder: Westview Press,

philosophy is nothing less than the invention of a world of appearances *without* presuppositions, simply *as* a world of endlessly repeating appearances.

What one should bear in mind is that, in order for Plato to posit, or invent, archetypal ideas as the exemplars of the objects of experience that reproduce them, it is necessary for him to start with a clean slate—to unanchor the sensory world of appearances in any point of origin, so as to replace it with another, ideal, archetypal origin. The sensuous world of appearances starts nowhere, it ends nowhere, it repeats endlessly, it is a true case of *creatio ex nihilo*. So the universe of archetypal values and meanings—culminating in Plato’s “architectonic” ordering of the world—emerges only when he has accomplished two interrelated, preliminary tasks: first, to assert that the world of sensuous life-experience is ectypal or impressionary; and second, to say that the ectypal objects of this life-world have no origin, but are instead replicas of other ectypal entities. And only when Plato has reduced the sensuous life-world to nothing but the endless repetition of images or ectypes without origin, can he proceed to order it as the copy of an archetype: his architectonic ordering of the world. Paradoxically, what is constructive in a foundational sense in Plato’s political-philosophical enterprise is the destructive assertion that the world I grasp sensuously is not the world itself. The ideal *polis* is merely a logical conclusion that follows on the much more daring point that the world as we commonly experience it is an infinite abyss of endless repetition, a region of appearances *ex nihilo*. And the architectonic order of ideas puts an end to all that.

It is on the basis of what Plato says about the sensuous life-world being the domain of endless repetition that the idea of an archetypal region makes sense and acquires the appeal necessary for his political-philosophical project. Only once we appreciate the more fundamental, “ectypal” revolution in Plato’s thought, can we ask the question of political legitimation, which is: how can the political-philosophical system of immortal values and meanings, irreducible to the level of the ectypal world, emerge as part of the existence of a human, and therefore mortal, being? What is the specific structure of human existence, so that a human being is able to experience his or her existence as embedded in a meaningful whole?

Plato’s answer to these questions revolves around a specific conception of the self, according to which the self is larger than and precedes the individual who, as we say, “has” a self. The key to Plato’s “impressionization” of the world is his destabilizing of what it means to be a human, to the effect that the human self is something that flows between individuals, rather than delimits the differences between them. In short, Plato dissolves the human self so that it is no longer anchored in any individual; he dissolves the self in a world of relationships that is prior to individuality and within which individuality itself takes shape.

There is no explicit argument to the effect that “I am not myself” in the *Republic*. Instead, Plato describes the self in a language that strongly suggests such a view, and in what follows I have identified four sections of the *Republic* where Plato’s language evokes the idea that the human self is an ectype, or an impression, without origins. These sections all come from the end of Book II, which concerns the birth of the city and the

early childhood education of its exemplary citizens, the guardians and future philosopher-kings.

The Impressionistic Self

First, consider the passage where Socrates and his interlocutors agree that, *a propos* of early childhood education, there are two aspects: the cultivation of the body, and the cultivation of the mind. The body is cultivated by means of gymnastics, but before children are old enough for that, they are introduced to *musike*, which includes music, dancing, and storytelling, or *logos*. *Logos* takes one of two forms, the true (*alethes*) or the false (*pseudos*). Storytelling begins not with the true, but with the false, and the word for a false story is myth, or *muthos*. Following this, Socrates observes that “the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing (*neo kai hapalo hotooun*); for that is the time at which it is most easily molded (*malista...plattetai*), and takes on any character (*enduetai tupos*) which one wishes to stamp on it (*ensemenasthai*).”⁶²

Here, Plato’s conception of the human being as an ectype hinges on the term *ensemenasthai*: “an impression is taken.” On the one hand, what is conveyed by the term *ensemenasthai* is that information is conducted from the mouth and hands of the storyteller through the eyes and ears of the listener, towards a destination within the child, what Plato calls *psuche*: this idea is found in the root verb, *semaino*, which basically means “to show by a sign.” Yet there is more to it than that, for Plato’s use of *semaino* is

⁶² Plato, *Republic*, 377a12-b3.

in the middle voice, meaning “to stamp,” “to mark,” or “to seal.” The signaling makes an impression, that is, in the act of storytelling, the story is “stamped” into the *psuche* or mind of the child. So we are not dealing with a simple matter of communication. Or better, the language here indicates a kind of intimate, physical, encounter that attends the purely semantic aspect of storytelling. The dual sense of “signaling” and “stamping” is also present in “to intimate,” which is also the usual translation of the word Plato uses, *ensemenasthai*. As a verb, “intimate” means to communicate indirectly, but as an adjective, it denotes precisely that close physical connection between people that would enable an indirect gesture or sign to be noticed and understood.

The sense of physical closeness that is involved in the notion of intimacy, as well as in the notion of stamping, also comes through in the other key word in the passage quoted above, that is, *plattein*, the infinitive form of the verb *plasso*, which here means “to mold or form by education or training.” In general, the term applies to artists who work in clay or wax (not painting), and in terms of child-rearing, and the word group is also used to refer to massaging an infant’s body.⁶³ But elsewhere in the *Republic*, the term *plattein* is used to describe the forming of an image of a thing in the mind, that is, “imagining” (420c, 466a). So we could say that nurses and mothers give psychic form to their children by “making images” in their children’s *psuchai*, by means of storytelling. Words literally become part of the living body that hears them, they shape the character of that body in their own images.

⁶³ Rober Renehan, “Greek Lexicographical Notes,” in *Hypomnemata* (Göttingen: Vandenhoech & Ruprecht, 1982), ser. 2, p. 118, s.v. *plasis*.

In fact, we should say that, according to Plato, the child has no character prior to its molding in the shape of myths. In Plato's thought, the notion of character and the notion of a molding merge into a single entity. We have already seen that when myths are told, it is a matter of *plattein*, "shaping," "molding," "making an image." At 377b1, where the child is described as a "young and tender thing," the word for the "character" that is shaped into an image is *tupos*: but *tupos* doesn't just mean "character"; it also means "image." Plato could have written: "for that is the time at which the image (*tupos*, "character") is being shaped (*plattetai*)." Prior to the process of *ensemenasthai*, of "being stamped upon," there is no *tupos*, no character or image. The character is the impression formed in the intimacy between mother and child.

All this is further borne out by the range of meanings possessed by the term for "character" or "image," *tupos*. The basic sense here is that of "striking": for instance, horses' hooves pounding as they beat on the ground. In general, *tupos* introduces the idea of a driving or blowing force to the concept of character-formation. The stamp on a branding iron is also *tupos*, bringing to mind the Nietzschean concept of "mnemotechnics": "If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory."⁶⁴ In a similar vein, the stamp on a coin is *tupos*. And in the image struck on a coin, we find a connection back to *plasso*, "I make an image," as well as the related word *plasma*: anything formed or molded. Beyond the plastic arts, *tupos* also describes any hollow mold or *matrix*, not just for casting plasters,

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 61.

but in particular as used by fruit growers to shape the fruit while it is growing on the tree. *Matrix* is also the term for “womb”; the connection to human development is not hard to make. And thus a further connection to children: what comes out of the mold or *matrix* is *tupos*, as children are called the *tupoi* of their parents, the image of their forebears. Every child is *tupos* in that it is given shape by its mold, but if a child becomes a woman, she is also *tupos* in that she becomes the mold that gives shape to her children. That is, what *tupos* designates is neither the cast nor the molding, neither the original pattern nor the copy, but the entire range of effects produced by a single phenomenon, what could be defined as “intimacy.”

What Plato does with the language of shaping and blowing is to describe a kind of ground-zero of the self, the absolute beginning of the self’s formation, to the effect that there is no self prior to the intimate relationship between child and mother or nurse. In short, when it comes to the self, there is nothing there except for impressions, stamps, blows, or moldings. But what is also crucial here is the idea that once character has been formed out of intimacy, it cannot be said that the character of the child is distinct from the stamp that defined it. As a concept of the self, *tupos* expands beyond the physical boundaries of a single individual, rather encompassing multiple individuals within a single phenomenon, the relation of intimacy. The active principle in forming a human self is the intimacy, not the mother or the child. It is not the subjective content of the

personality of the women that makes its way into the minds of the children; they are rather the mouthpieces for the circulation of *muthos* throughout their society.⁶⁵

Children live and grow in a world of myths, in a society of stories that circulate between the mouths and ears of everyone, of impressions formed by the power of the tongue alone, or rather, the power of the word, in the service of which the tongue of a storyteller is an agent. What I would like to depict is this puerile existence, what we would see were we to adopt a different, more mature perspective on ourselves: Images flow all around me, I do not see one image as being “deeper” than another, they all have equal weight, I belong to this world, it is my world, my world consists of nothing but stories, yet I do not even know that, for all stories have equal weight in this world, in my mind, made up of nothing but images, images come and go, I make no assumptions about their origin nor their destination, yesterday, today, tomorrow, it is just one procession of images.

Does this not capture the meaning of *goes*, “sorcerer,” when Socrates says, of the gods as they are portrayed in traditional tales: “Do you think that the god is a sorcerer (*goeta*), able to make himself appear (*phantazesthai*) in different forms (*allais ideais*) at different times, sometimes turning himself into different shapes and changing his form (*to hautou eidos eis pollas morphas*), sometimes deceiving us and making us think such things about himself, or do you think that he is simple (*haploun*) and least of all things

⁶⁵ So nothing really originates with mothers; they circulate the ancient myths. In contrast, the figure of the father, which we will come upon presently, stands for an origin: furthermore, there are not fathers but only a Father, a source and author of all things, in relation to which the validity or legitimacy of all appearances or ectypes is measured.

departs from his form (*ideas*)?" (380d1-6) The use of the words *ideais*, *eidos* and *ideas* to describe the preferred god's shape or form underlines the link between this passage and the later development of the theory of Forms at 476-480 and 523-525.⁶⁶ The importance of singleness or simplicity runs as a motif throughout the *Republic* in relation both to the state, in which one person will do one job (370b-c, 374a-d, 433a-434d), and (analogously) to the individual, whose soul will be in harmony when each part performs its proper function (441c-444e). The unified and unchanging divinity that Plato postulates thus reflects the type of human character that his educational system is designed to foster.⁶⁷

But what is important for us is not the ideal image of a god, rather the kind of god such a paragon ought to replace. The god who is *goes*, meaning "sorcerer" or "wizard," is a shape-shifter, someone who "juggles" his image. Better, the *goes* in this case is nothing but shifting images, there is nothing else there besides constantly changing images. When Socrates says that such a god is "able to make himself appear in different forms at different times," Plato uses the word *phantazesthai* for "to make himself appear," and the related word *phantazein* means "to make visible," or "to present to the mind," and in the passive voice, "to imagine." The god of the ancient myth is a sorcerer, but not in the sense of a puppet master behind his constantly changing appearances: he is purely shifting appearances without reality. If *tupos* refers to an impression that is the

⁶⁶ 380d2 (*ideais*), 380d3 (*eidos*), 380d6 and 380e1 (*ideas*).

⁶⁷ For this argument, see Penelope Murray, *Plato on Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 147.

character of the young when they are exposed to stories about the gods, then *phantasma* are what remains in the child as a result.

So when Socrates mentions the objectionable god “offering *phantasma* of himself in word or deed” (382a2), the idea is that the god changes himself into different shapes. But the question of whether or not gods are literally multiple in shape or singular is a distraction from the crucial point, which is that the young naturally assume that what appears to them is all there is, and they literally become whatever makes its way into their heads. After all, does Socrates not say that “the young cannot distinguish what is allegorical (*huponoia*) from what is not, and the beliefs they acquire at that age are hard to wash out and are likely to become unalterable”? (278e1-3) This simply confirms what has already been noted about Plato identifying *tupos*, or “character,” as an image or impression left on the mind of a person after it has been “stamped” by some story. The term *huponoia*, usually translated as “allegorical,” also bears out the connection between self, image, and impression. Literally meaning “suspicious,” in this context the sense of *huponoia* is “the real meaning lying at the bottom of something.” The young do not have the ability to distinguish between something that has a covert meaning and something that does not. In other words, the young are naïve: everything has equal weight; they emulate everything and suspect nothing.

So when Socrates says that the first principle guiding the judgment of myths is that the good cannot be harmful, and the divinity, since it is good, cannot be the cause of evil (336a), isn't he saying that the gods shouldn't be said to be shape-shifters? The reason for this is simply that if the gods were said to be shape-shifters without any reality,

that would do harm to children were they to hear such things. The child, *tupos* or image of its parents, is also the imprint left behind whenever a myth passes by its ears. The myth about phantoms leaves its trace by turning the child who hears it into a phantom itself. That is what happens when you lack the ability to distinguish between what is allegorical, *huponoia*, and what is not.

Finally, there is the passage when Socrates says, “no one desires of their own free will to be deceived (*pseudesthai*) in the most important part (*to kuriotato*) of himself about the most important things (*ta kuriotata*), but is especially afraid to be held in deception there (*ekei auto kekesthai*)” (382a7-9). I shall argue that what this means is that no one wants to lose control of his or her own mind. “The most important part” could mean many things different people, but Plato uses the expression *to kuriotato*, which is the superlative form of *kurios*, an adjective referring to persons having power or authority over something, or being in possession of something, something like “sovereign.” Later in the *Republic*, *to kurios* means “the sovereign power in a state,” that is, philosophy, the mind or intellectual power of a human being (565a). Plato also uses the term *kekesthai* to suggest the hold that a lie (*pseudos*) has on the mind: this word *kekesthai*, the perfect passive form of *kteomai*, which means “to possess,” or “to hold a property,” while the substantive *ho kektemenos*, that which possesses, means “a master.” Plato thus brings up the image of a mind that is possessed by lies, as a lord takes possession over a piece of land, but, as the ancient tales have it, the lord in this case is the phantom-god, the objectionable juggler-god, the pure appearances without boundaries.

Indeed, it would be better to labor on earth in service of another than to lose possession of one's mind. The picture we should get from this is not somebody whose mind is wandering, but instead a person who *is* a mind that does nothing but wander, as one image succeeds another, an endless repetition of images, yesterday, today, tomorrow, always the same. This is death, which is why physical labor would be preferable, at least a death where one is "a soul, a mere wraith, with no mind at all" (*psuche kai eidolon, atar phrenes ouk eni pampan*, 386d5). This is a death consisting of "ghosts gliding about" (*skiai aissousi*), permanently wandering without rest (386d7).

A heavy dose of suspicion takes care of that, however. The function of myths—which are lies—about an unchanging god is to take possession of the *psuche* in order to create a single, unchanging truth in the character of the child who hears it. In other words, only in that way will a child learn to tell the difference between reality and allegory, or the true and the false. To begin with, true and false in this context mean "seemly" and "unseemly"—which refers to the singularity or multiplicity of the gods depicted in myth, as well as the kind of impression left by those myths in the characters of the children who hear them. Paradoxically, in order for people to learn to see "behind" things as they appear, they must believe in a reality which is ultimate and behind which there is nothing. Yet is this not exactly how things appeared before, when everything was purely phantasmic? Moreover, in the cultivation of a soul, there is nothing "behind" the world of myth, either. The difference between the suspicious view and the naïve is that the suspicious mind sees another world behind everything that appears, while the naïve one sees nothing behind anything.

So the point is not only to avoid creating a phantasm, but also to create suspicion in the young. These both entail impressing upon them the idea of a fixed and unchanging reality. Knowledge of the reality behind appearances will be very useful in the social world, since people are not necessarily the way they appear (cf. 334c6-8: “surely people make mistakes about this, and consider many to be helpful when they are not, and often make the opposite mistake about enemies?”). Plato introduces the concepts of allegory and phantasy to the picture of an ectypal self, in order to build a bridge to the introduction of philosophy proper in the books that follow.

The fact that Socrates says that scary stories about death shouldn't be told, yet tells them himself in order to make traditional poetry seem unsuitable, is a paradox that characterizes exactly the method of Plato's destruction of the world and the “architectonic” ordering of it according to new, philosophical, standards. At 377b11, Socrates says:

...the first thing to do, it seems to me, is to establish control over the mythmakers (*epistateteon muthopoiis*)...and we will persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children the acceptable stories to shape (*plattein*) their minds by means of these myths, more than they shape their bodies by their hands...

What relation do the founders have to the city they are establishing? The founders are *oikistai*, “colonizers,” “founders of a city,” or “ones who frame constitutions for a city.” But there is something strange about the founding of this city. Plato has Socrates talk himself into the myth he is about to tell, Plato sets Socrates up as an imitation of himself, as a replica or ectype. This spins a very intricate web connecting the founding of the city to its citizens and children within a single, ectypal relationship:

You and I, Adeimantus, are not poets now, but we are founding (*oikistai*) a polis, and it is proper that founders (*oikistais*) should know the patterns (*tupous*) which the poets must follow in telling their stories, that the founders (*oikistai*) impart patterns or character (*tupos*) to the poets according to two principles...

What is notable about this idea of a founder is that the founder's relation to the poets whose stories are told by mothers and nurses is the same as the relation of the mothers and nurses to their children. That is, the founders know the "patterns," *tupous*, the "general character" of the myths that are to be told. And the myths are to bear this character, just as the children of mothers are "blown" into the shape of the images that they and the nurses impart to them. The social and political structure of the ideal city is bounded ectypally, or as Plato is about to put it, *mimetically*.

How does this relate back to the question of political legitimation? Recall that political legitimation involves the conferral of legitimate status upon the exercise of power by some authority. The question then is under what conditions an authority confers legitimacy, or, more exactly, how is it that a person can find himself or herself embedded within a universe of meanings so that it is possible for him or her to confer status upon the exercise of power when it conforms to the structure of that universe? In Plato's case, the question is how the philosophical universe of values itself becomes meaningful to the authority who confers legitimacy upon the ideal city. In other words, how does a world of endless repetition of ectypes become a world of meaning? In Plato's case, the answer is that the process of becoming embedded within a universe of meanings is itself ectypal. But if we thought that Plato's treatment of myth was ambivalent, then his theorization of the ectype in terms of *mimesis* will seem much more so. Plato

suggests that the legitimation of the philosophical regime calls for a mimetic transformation of people into philosophical citizens, all the while writing that *mimesis* is dangerous, seductive, and ultimately harmful to the life of the community.

Mimesis and Philosophy

The Platonic concept of the “real,” as it applies to human behavior, is opposed to the kinds of acting, poetry, and other public performances that Plato calls *mimesis*, or “imitation.” *Mimesis*, according to Plato, means to speak or act in the voice or gestures of another, as opposed to *haple diegesis*, “simple narrative,” which means to speak or act in one’s own voice or gestures. Within this framework, the ideal political subject is “real,” and thus becomes the ideal object of representation for political knowledge, to the extent that he or she speaks in his or her own voice. The philosophical regime is legitimate for the philosophical, i.e., non-imitative, person. But this non-imitative person must be produced, since according to the *Republic*, people are prone to apish and uncomprehending mimicry of others. The sovereignty of philosopher-kings and the expulsion of “mimetic” artists from the ideal city are two political goals that are meant to act as forces in the creation of a manifold ideal: the “real” of knowledge, the non-imitative person, the ideal political subject, and the legitimate political regime. But all this leads to a rather significant paradox lying at the heart of Platonic political philosophy.

Plato describes the kind of rulership that produces the philosophical and political ideal of univocality in terms that are astonishingly mimetic. That is, the production of the

ideal political subject, as well as the production of an object of knowledge that lives up to the standards of philosophical understanding, involve a *mimesis*. To be precise, *mimesis* is permitted in the ideal city—*mimesis* is even *necessary* in the ideal city—to the extent that it only entails the imitation of that which is univocal. In other words, the only kind of imitation that is permitted is the imitation of that which is not an imitation of anything. How one could imitate that which is essentially non-imitative is the paradox that lies at the heart of the Platonic political-philosophical project.

In order to address this paradox, I am going to bring together four interrelated issues. First, as I have already said, Platonic philosophical values, in particular its political values, are defined in opposition to *mimesis*. Second, Platonic philosophical values revolve around a common characteristic, that is, the high estimation of singularity, immutability, originality, self-sameness and univocality. Third, singularity and immutability, in the political sphere at least, do not appear by necessity but must be created by humans in humans. Fourth, the production of the conditions of political legitimacy, where the rule of philosophy makes sense, is valid, that is, the creation of singularity in a human being, all this involves a *mimesis*, a *mimesis* that can be summarized in the following paradoxical maxim: imitate that which is original.

Plato's Criticism of Mimesis

There are of course two main discussions about *mimesis* in the *Republic*, one taking place in Books II and III, from 376e to 398b, the other occurring in Book X, from 595 to 608b. The earlier conversation amounts to an examination of narrative styles, the

later one an account of the visual arts; yet, for the purposes of criticism, the two examinations of imitation accomplish a single goal, that is, the foundation of a conceptual framework within which the defense of philosophy and philosophical politics is assured victory, to the detriment of poetry and *mimesis* in general.

In brief and provisional way, we might say that Plato clears the path for a theory of identity politics when he draws a line between poets who speak in their own voice and those who do not. Of course, Plato has no particular word for “identity”; nevertheless, that is what he is referring to when he describes narrative genres in terms of “simple” or “imitative” styles:

[In simple narration], the poet is speaking in his own person; he never leads us to suppose that he is any one else....But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?...And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character he assumes....and in this case the narrative or the poet may be said to proceed by way of imitation. (393a5-c7)

Mimesis means to make oneself like another in voice or bearing, but it is not simply a matter of copying another person, and the reasons why imitation is objectionable are not purely aesthetic. They are ethical and political. In the Platonic context, the fusion of the literary and the ethical-political occurs in the single view that *mimesis*, as the assimilation of oneself to the voice and gesture of another, amounts to a kind of self-distortion.⁶⁸ When the poet speaks in the person of another, he does all that he can to

⁶⁸ For interweaving notions of entrancement, multiple-personality and contagion into my interpretation of Plato's *Republic*, and for the illumination of how rich the theme of

make us believe that the speaker is not himself but instead that he is the character in the poem (393c1-3). Thus the ethical and political dimension of Platonic *mimesis* does not lie in the relation between a poet and the literary figures he impersonates; Platonic *mimesis* represents a peril for members of the audience, who witness the poet's impersonation of his characters, yet who think they stand outside that relationship. The truth, according to Plato, is that they are not neutral observers of the poet's performance. Indeed, they run the very real risk of unwittingly assimilating to the imitator "himself."

Far from representing any danger for the person being imitated, Platonic *mimesis* menaces the *psuche* of the innocent bystander. In other words, just as the poet or actor assimilates himself to the voice and gesture of the character he wishes to portray, so too does the audience assimilate itself to the voice and gesture of the poet or actor. The difference is that whereas the poet imitates an original character, the audience assimilates itself to an imitation.⁶⁹ Held entranced by a mimetic performer, the audience member is transformed into the imitation of an imitation.

The spectator of a mimetic performance assimilates to, that is, imitates, someone who assimilates to or imitates some original model. The spectator loses himself in a

mimesis is in general, I am most indebted to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's lectures on "The Literary Trance" at the University of Washington, Spring 1997.

⁶⁹ In this context, the originality of Homeric characters does not imply that they are in any way more real than the poet's representation of them. In contrast, the originality of the Forms does denote their superior level of reality in comparison with the material objects that reproduce them. In this second usage, Locke copies Plato: when Locke says that "original" of political power is in the state of nature, he means to say that the laws deduced from that state are more real than the principles of political right that Robert Filmer derives from the Book of Genesis.

mimetic performance not just in the sense of character with the actor or poet. It is instead a real loss of identity for the spectator, since what he identifies with is nothing, a mere imitation. Following the logic of the *mimesis*, in assimilating with nothing, the spectator becomes nothing: he is no longer what he was. The poet is not himself either; their identities dissolve in the enchanting spectacle of the performance.

The Politics of the Performance

At the most basic level, the mimetician, speaking in the voice of many others, violates the fundamental principle of the well-ordered community: the division of labor. Early in the dialogue, it is established that the very reason why people seek to live in common is that it makes more sense to divide the tasks necessary for maintaining life among several, rather than for each individual to do everything himself (369e1-370a7). This is later turned into a more philosophically grounded principle, according to which each member of the ideal city acquires a fixed character by virtue of belonging to the community. That is, each citizen learns to speak in his or her own voice, and this principle of one person, one voice is in full play when it comes to criticizing *mimesis*.

...the mixed style [of narrative] is also very charming: and indeed the pantomimic, which is the opposite of the one chosen by you, is the most popular style with children and their attendants, and with the world in general...but such a style is unsuitable to our State, in which human nature is not twofold or manifold, for one man plays one part only.
(397d8-e2)

In other words, it is not only that the imitator intentionally goes out of his way to deceive others into thinking that he is someone other than himself. We need not venture too far from this to reach a new argument, the difference being that instead of a poet

trying to make us believe that he is Achilles or Odysseus, it is the same poet trying to make us think that he is an expert in the various *technai* that his characters perform in his poetry: the art of war, of shipbuilding, of speechmaking, of medicine.⁷⁰

But it is not just that the mimetic poet contradicts the social order by occupying multiple positions within the division of labor. We must return to the idea that *mimesis* threatens the integrity of the person with dissolution. In fact, there is only one argument here: It is precisely in not possessing a single occupation that the poet lacks a true self; his polytechnics are more importantly a pantomimicry, and this is the true charge against him. In brief, not only does he occupy multiple positions within the division of labor, but this pantomime of others' occupations amounts to nothing more than the pure illusion of being anybody at all.

The poets, and the mimetic actor, are "wizards" (*goes*) capable of seducing the members of their audiences away from their own selves. For Plato, *mimesis* steals one away from one's self. And it is precisely in terms of self-loss that *mimesis* is found to contradict the principle of order in a community. Yet the argument goes much farther, or rather Plato repeats it on the scale of the individual, in that the reasons why *mimesis*

⁷⁰ Cf. 598c6-d5: "...when we hear persons saying that the tragedians, and Homer, who is at their head, know all the arts and all things human, virtue as well as vice, and divine things too, for that the good poet cannot compose well unless he knows his subject, and that he who has not this knowledge can never be a poet, we ought to consider whether here also there may not be a similar illusion. Perhaps they may have come across imitators and been deceived by them... And whenever any one informs us that he has found a man who knows all the arts, and all things else that anybody knows, and every single thing with a higher degree of accuracy than any other man... we can only imagine him to be a simple creature who is likely to have been deceived by some

violates the social order is precisely that it also contradicts the individual order. The accusations made against *mimesis* have just as much to do with the division of labor within each member of the *polis* as with the *polis* taken in its entirety.

To begin with, according to Plato, mimetic performance is addressed to “that weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and of deceiving by light and shadow and other ingenious devices imposes, having an effect upon us like magic” (602d2). This is more than a susceptibility to optical illusions. It is a real upsurge of irrationality, brought about by the assimilative power of the mimetic actor over his audience. It is not just that human beings are already prone to behave irrationally in public, to the extent that we are liable to get swept up in the charged atmosphere of an exciting event.

As Plato saw it, whenever citizens and their families are gathered in one place, each one who is present is susceptible to a kind of transformation whereby he or she gets lost in the crowd, as we might say:

When they meet together, and the world sits down at an assembly, or in a court of law, or a theater, or a camp, or in any other popular resort, and there is a great uproar, and they praise some things which are being said or done, and blame other things, equally exaggerating both, shouting and clapping their hands, and the echo of the rocks and the place in which they are assembled redoubles the sound of the praise or blame....(492b4-c2)

Even ordinarily mute stones are unable to resist joining in with crowd's excitement. Add to the seductive power of the gathered crowd itself the allegation that

wizard or actor whom he met, and whom he thought all-knowing, because he himself was unable to analyze the nature of knowledge and ignorance and imitation."

mimetic actors will strive to represent only the most irrational characters,⁷¹ and the result is a potentially explosive mob mentality. But Plato is saying much more than the common observation that if you place an actor in front of a crowd of people, he will do what he can to please them, even at the expense of their otherwise dignified composure. The ingenuity of Plato's argument is that the crowd will be moved by the actor's performance, it will assimilate to the characters to which the actor assimilates himself; it will do all this by virtue of a process that can only be described as *contagion*:

As in a city when the evil are permitted to have authority and the good are put out of the way, so in the soul of man, as we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature....Few persons ever reflect, as I should imagine, that from the evil of other men something of evil is communicated to themselves....the same holds also of the ridiculous....having stimulated the risible faculty at the theater, you are betrayed unconsciously to yourself into playing the comic poet at home. (605b5-606d5)

It is not enough for Plato to say that spectators get involved with the performance. It is rather that the performance gets involved with the spectators. The mimetic actor infects each member of the audience with a bit of his own persona, and as Plato puts it in this most vivid passage, each one then spreads the disease to his family at home. The upshot of all this is of course that the mimetic germ, as we might put it, destroys the

⁷¹ Cf. 604d6-605a6: "...the other principle of the soul, which inclines us to recollection of our troubles and to lamentation, and can never have enough of them, we may call irrational, useless, and cowardly....and does not the latter—I mean the rebellious principle—furnish a great variety of materials for imitation? Whereas the wise and calm temperament, being always nearly equable, is not easy to imitate or to appreciate when imitated, especially at a public festival when a promiscuous crowd is assembled in a theater....the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily imitated."

integrity not just of the actor but of the audience members as well. From the claim that the mimetic actor is capable of infecting his audience with his own irrationality, Plato is only a step away from the peak of vehemence in his accusation against *mimesis*. The mimetic actor does not just wreak havoc on the integrity of the body politic by violating the division of labor; he also destroys the self-mastery of his audience by refusing to control himself in public.⁷²

According to Plato's political economy of the self, reason should rule, it should be served by spirit, and appetite should serve them both. Because it reverses the internal division of labor, *mimesis* represents the danger of an inner regicide for each member of its audience. The tragic actor imitates the trials and tribulations of other men and women, and in this he assimilates himself into an intemperate and disturbed being, in whom, as Plato writes, the soul "is full of ten thousand oppositions occurring at the same moment" (603d5). That volatility and multivocality will be transmitted to the souls of his audience, where it ultimately destroys the integrity of the body politic itself. *Mimesis* is a contagion, threatening to dissolve not just the individual bodies of the public but the body politic itself.

⁷² Cf. 603c3-d3: "Imitation imitates the actions of men, whether voluntary or involuntary, on which, as they imagine, a good or bad result has ensued, and they rejoice or sorrow accordingly....in all this variety of circumstance is the man at unity with himself—or rather, as in the instance of sight there was confusion and opposition in his opinions about the same things, so here also is there not strife and inconsistency in his life?"

Philosophy and Singularity

If *mimesis* dissolves the unity of the body politic as well as the bodies of its members, and if it achieves its power over individuals by entrancing them with the multiple images it endlessly reproduces, then obviously philosophy, as anti-*mimesis*, will give all the dignity and honor to singularity and originality.

Plato depicts philosophy achieving everything that *mimesis* cannot do. He affiliates his philosophy with the norms of singularity by claiming that philosophy unites the mimetically dismembered body of the polity and unifies the characters of those who inhabit it. In the final analysis, the philosophical regime is legitimate because of the power of philosophy to unite and unify. But it is not only in light of the damage done by *mimesis* that the power of philosophy to unite and unify is a meaningful alternative for those who confer legitimacy upon the philosophical regime. Philosophy sets things up in relation to a source, an origin, and the meaningfulness of philosophy *qua* standard of legitimation correlates precisely to the fact that it places the individuals who practice it, as well as the regime that is ruled according to it, in a direct line to an origin, to a source. In other words, philosophy traces out lineages of legitimacy in terms of proximity or distance to an origin. *Mimesis*, the phenomenon of endless repetition, can point to no origin, no source, every image it produces is equally depthless, things appear out of nowhere, while with philosophy, everything has its source, philosophy traces the lines of descent from that source and determines the legitimacy of things according to such

lineages. Platonic philosophy unites and unifies by establishing the relation of things to their origins. As genealogy, philosophy becomes meaningful for those who practice it.

To take the question of singularity first: In Plato's discussion of the education of the guardians, and in particular in the passages concerning the relation of character to narrative style in Book III, when Socrates and his interlocutors distinguish between *mimesis*, speaking in the voice of many others, and *haple diegesis* or "simple narration," speaking in one's own voice, what is at stake is the formation of a kind of human character that is appropriate for a well-ordered community. The good citizen, that is, the guardian, the recipient of a philosophical education, pretty much limits himself or herself to simple narration: "Then [the good guardian] will adopt a mode of narration such as we have illustrated out of Homer, that is to say, his style will be both imitative and narrative; but there will be very little of the former, and a great deal of the latter" (396e3-6). The adoption of philosophical single-mindedness, that is, resistance to *mimesis*, is also integral to one's sense of duty to the State ("...they will have to be watched at every age, in order that we may see whether they preserve their resolution, and never, under the influence either of force or enchantment, forget or cast off their sense of duty to the State," 412e4-7).

In contrast, *mimesis* must be suppressed because it does not really suit the kind of character that is necessary for the community to be well ordered.⁷³ Imitativeness

⁷³ Cf. 396b7-c5; 396d4-9: "...there is one sort of narrative style which may be employed by a truly good man when he has anything to say, and that another sort will be used by a man of an opposite character and education....a just and good man in the course of a narration comes on some saying or action of another good man,—I should imagine that

produces not single-mindedness but what we could well call multiple personality disorder:

As I was just saying, he will attempt to represent the roll of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or the creaking of wheels, and pulleys, and the various sounds of flutes; pipes, trumpets, and all sorts of instruments: he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock; his entire art will consist in imitation of voice of gesture, and there will be very little narration. (397a1-c2).⁷⁴

Furthermore, *mimesis* presents the threat of enchantment. If a guard were to be enchanted through *mimesis*, he would lose himself, and Plato conceptualizes this self-loss as “forgetfulness”:

...to imagine things as they are (*to ta onta*) is to be truthful....mankind are deprived of such truths against their will....this involuntary deprivation is caused either by theft, or force, or enchantment (*goeteuthentes*)...some men are changed by persuasion and others forget....the enchanted are those who change their minds either under the softer influence of pleasure,

he will like to personate him, and will not be ashamed of this sort of imitation...but when he comes to a character which is unworthy of him, he will not make a study of that; he will disdain such a person, and will assume his likeness, if at all, for a moment only when he is performing some good action; at other times he will be ashamed to play a part which he has never practiced, nor will he like to fashion and frame himself after the baser models; he feels the employment of such an art, unless in jest, to be beneath him, and his mind revolts at it."

⁷⁴ It is worth quoting this passage in full: "...there is another sort of character who will narrate anything, and, the worse he is, the more unscrupulous he will be; nothing will be too bad for him: and he will be ready to imitate anything, not as a joke, but in right good earnest, and before a large company. As I was just saying, he will attempt to represent the roll of thunder, the noise of wind and hail, or the creaking of wheels, and pulleys, and the various sounds of flutes; pipes, trumpets, and all sorts of instruments: he will bark like a dog, bleat like a sheep, or crow like a cock; his entire art will consist in imitation of voice of gesture, and there will be very little narration. These, then, are the two kinds of narrative style. One of them is simple, singular, unchanging, and the result is that the speaker in that mode is always pretty much the same in his or her own style.

or the sterner influence of fear....everything that deceives may be said to enchant. (413a6-c3)

The opposite of knowing the truth—it could be a matter of forgetting the truth, or of accepting what is not true—in either case, this amounts to an “enchantment,” (*goeteuthentes*) which we must understand precisely as a loss in these terms: “I am not myself.” By contrast, imagining things as they are amounts to self-possession. Thus “forgetting,” which is kind of enchantment, leads one astray not just from things as they are, but from oneself as well. It takes a special kind of person to resist forgetfulness, to remember who one is through the memory of how things are (*to ta onta*). The kind of person who remembers is the one particularly well suited to the demands of the well-ordered state: “...he who remembers and is not deceived is to be selected....” (413c406)⁷⁵

If the guardian speaks in simple narrative in order not to forget who he or she is, this is an act of opposition to *mimesis*. Taking control of *mimesis* is at the heart of the production of singularity in the character of the ideal subject-citizens of the well-ordered polis. And, let us recall, the mimetician has been defined as a “wizard,” and “enchanter” and a “deceiver,” whose power is precisely that of taking people away from themselves. If Plato associates his idea of philosophy with a kind of *internal* singularity, with the very idea of being who one is, this is noticeable particularly in the contrast between imagining the truth and being deceived as to the nature of things (*to ta onta*). As the education of

⁷⁵ Cf. 413e9-12: “...we may discover whether they are armed against all enchantments, and of a noble bearing always, good guardians of themselves and of the music which

philosophers proceeds, the guardians move beyond imagining things as they are, towards knowledge of reality in itself.

The aim of Platonic philosophical education remains the same, that is, to produce single-minded citizens. This aim achieves its apotheosis in relation to the Form of the Good, which, as Socrates says, is “the greatest object of study” in the education of guardians and in the philosophical way of life (505a2). Knowledge of the Form of the Good gives rise to both a unified mind and a united city, according to the famous passages of Book VI when Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the highest aim of philosophy: “our constitution will be perfectly ordered when such a man looks after it—that is, a man who has this knowledge” (506b1).

Knowledge of the Form of the Good brings unity to the mind of the knower, and unification to the social world he or she inhabits. To make this clear, Socrates describes the power of the Good in terms of its famous analogy with the sun, which is the “offspring” of the Good. The function of the sun is to give unity to the elements making up the visible realm. That is, the sun brings together sight and being seen: it “causes our sight to see as beautifully as possible, and the objects of sight to be seen,” and through it “the sense of sight and the power of being seen are yoked together....” (508a5, 507e4-508a1)

they have learned, and retaining under all circumstances a rhythmical and harmonious nature, such will be most serviceable to the individual and to the State."

If the sun is to be considered as a “yoke” that unifies the seeing and seen elements comprising the realm of the visible, then the Good, though it has no name as such, performs the same function in the sphere of the intelligible:

...that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the idea of good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science (*dianoou*), and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge....(508e1-509a4)⁷⁶

The Good links the knower and the known, just as the sun is the “yoke” uniting seeing with being seen. Science, from the philosophical point of view, depends on a single-mindedness that only simple narrative can produce.⁷⁷ On the one hand, the sun is the source of sight, in the sense of providing for the possibility of seeing through illumination. This much is indicated when Plato has Socrates say, “the sun is not sight, but the author of sight, recognized by sight.” The light of the sun is an invisible principle that provides for the unity of the field of visible perception, and likewise the Good is an underlying invisible principle that provides for the unity of the conceptual sphere, as well as the underlying unity of the public sphere. But on the other hand, and this is crucial, Socrates also says that “the power which the eye possesses is a sort of infusion which is dispensed from the sun” (508b5). This suggests that the act of seeing entails a kind of assimilation to the sun, to its source. So in addition to its epistemological and political

⁷⁶ It is worth reading on: “...and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honor yet higher.”

⁷⁷ Cf. 400d9-e3: “...beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity,—I mean the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character, not that other simplicity which is only an euphemism for folly.”

functions, the Good is also a principle of patriarchal, genealogical unity. In other words, the Good is a principle of unity for the mind and the state, but in addition, the Good is the source, the father of everything, it unites and unifies by virtue of its father-like attributes, that is, the closer one approaches to it, the closer one approaches to the origin, to the source, and in this approach one achieves the unity that only philosophy can deliver.

Philosophy and Originality

The unification of self in the course of a philosophical education amounts to an approach in the direction of a source and an origin: The sun, as Plato says, is “the child of the good, whom the good begat in his own likeness, to be in the visible world, in relation to sight and the things of sight, what the good is in the intellectual world in relation to mind and the things of mind” (508b10-c2). The Good, it follows, is the “father” of visual perception, and the “author” of knowledge:

...the sun is not only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation....In like manner the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence, and yet the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power. (509b2-8)

Knowledge of the Good consists in recognizing the father as the author of all things comprised within the sphere of knowledge. Thus the achievement of singularity takes place as an approach towards the author and father of everything. In other words, Plato has conceptualized the acquisition of singularity in terms of proximity to an origin, particularly the figure of the father-creator.

This figure of the father of all things makes another appearance during the criticism of *mimesis* in Book X. I am referring to the passage when Socrates tells Glaucon, “you call an imitator one whose product is at three removes from nature...this will be true also of the tragedian, as he is an imitator; he is naturally third from the king and the truth, and so are all other imitators” (597e1-4).

This passage refers to something like a set of three concentric spheres in which *mimesis* occupies the outer spheres, the imitations of imitations being in the third and the imitations of ideas in the second. The inner sphere is occupied by the ideas themselves, that is, the originals of which material objects are replicas. But each sphere also designates a different way of ordering the world. The occupants of the middle sphere, such as carpenters, architects, and manufacturers of usable goods, they order the world by manipulating the raw material of nature into the shapes of beds, houses, weapons, tools, and so forth; the occupants of the outer sphere, such as painters, poets, and actors, order the world by representing it in images, on walls or in their persona; the King, who occupies the inner sphere, imposes order on the world through the creation of ideas, the archetypes of all other creations.

Each sphere has its own ruler, and the ruler of each sphere—painter/poet, carpenter, king—exercises a different kind of creative power. In other words, each sphere is inhabited by a creator as well as a kind of creation—painters and their paintings, craftsmen and their tables, the king and his ideas. The term for this creation, *gennematos*, means “that which is produced or born.”

The issue at hand is thus a matter of distance from the source or origin, and that introduces the question of legitimacy—the fact that the mimetic actor or painter is three times removed from the truth is a politically relevant fact because it lowers the value of his creative power. The scheme Plato lays out in this passage had the mimetician appear as an imposter, as somebody who arrogates the glory of the king for himself.⁷⁸ This all becomes rather more clear when Plato asks whether the painter is not also capable of producing an entire world:

...there are beds and tables in the world....but there are only two ideas or forms of them—one the idea of a bed, the other of a table....the maker of either of them makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea...but no artificer makes the ideas themselves....there is another artist....one who is the maker of all the works of all other workmen....who is able to make not only vessels of every kind, but plants and animals, himself and all other things—the earth and heaven, and the things which are in heaven or under the earth; he makes the gods also....the painter is just such a creator of appearances...what he creates is untrue. And yet there is a sense in which the painter also creates a bed? (596b1-e11)

The mimetician not only impersonates the things of the world, but he impersonates the king himself, the creator-god of all that exists. To the extent that this god creates the original ideas that are copied by humans, the mimetician copies the originary power of the king himself. In other words, Plato has conceptualized the analogy between the originary creative power of the king, and the imitative pseudo-creative power of the mimetician as a kind of *mimesis* itself, between father and

⁷⁸ This is the sense of the word in one of its earliest appearances in English, appearing in 1685: "Satan called here (by a Mimesis) the god of this world, not simply and properly, but because he challenges to himself the honor of a god." s.v. "Mimesis," *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

illegitimate son, unlike the relation between the Good and the sun, which is its legitimate “offspring.”

Philosophy and Mimesis

It would seem then that we already know the answer to the question of whether or not the guardians are to practice any kind of *mimesis* themselves. As Socrates says:

... we must come to an understanding about the mimetic art,—whether the poets, in narrating their stories, are to be allowed by us to imitate, and if so, whether in whole or in part, and if the latter, in what parts; or should all imitation be prohibited? (394d1-4)

The guardians, the ideal members of the community, are to remain self-possessed, resistant to enchantment, univocal—how could they have anything to do with *mimesis*? After all, as Socrates adds, “has not this question been decided by the rule already laid down that one man can only do one thing well, and not many....” (394e2) We have already observed how *mimesis* is said to run against the fundamental principle of the division of labor, but the answer just given to the question at hand is based on the assumption that *mimesis* is to be understood as imitation of many things, as pantomimesis. It is still an open question whether it would be permissible for the guardians to imitate a single model. Or is imitation by its nature prohibited?

I would like to address this problem by repeating my earlier observation that throughout the *Republic*, and with a variety of images, Plato writes about the intimate connection between philosophy and the ideal of singularity. The king embodies the values of univocality and singularity; just as striking as this image is Plato’s use of the language of love to describe the proximity between the philosopher and the idea of

oneness. To take just a couple of examples: "...the philosopher is a lover, not of a part of wisdom only, but of the whole," or "true philosophers" are "those who are lovers of the vision of truth" (475b7, 475e4). The upshot of these and other, similar, sentiments is that the affinity between the philosopher and the true must be grasped in the sense of a longing for and a bond with one who does not wander. It is precisely in this sense that Plato seems to have discovered his own understanding of the term "true": the truth is what remains the same, it is that which was here yesterday, it is here today, and it will be here tomorrow, but it is in its connection with the sentiment of amorous reverence that the meaning of the true is to be grasped. Plato's idea of truth is understood as an unchanging, unwavering presence, but again, the essential connection is with the feelings of loyalty and faithfulness that the true provokes: "...philosophical minds always love knowledge of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from generation and corruption....they are lovers of all true being....the true lover of learning then must from his earliest youth, as far as in him lies, desire all truth" (485d2). As love of the true, philosophical knowledge is faithfulness to true being, to a partner that is true from childhood until death.

That the philosopher should experience such strong love for the eternal and unchangeable makes sense within the Platonic universe, since the true is also supremely beautiful: The philosopher "recognizes the existence of absolute beauty and is able to distinguish the idea from the objects which participate in the idea, neither putting the objects in the place of the idea nor the idea in the place of the objects..." (476d2-3) In addition to being quite evident that Plato has thought of the true as an absolute form of

beauty, and this accounts for the philosopher's attraction to it, absolute beauty is also distinguished as a principle of oneness, as the underlying unity of objects sharing a common characteristic. In sum, philosophical knowledge is here understood as a love, a love for the true, the true as that which does not change, that which does not change as a principle of unity, unity as absolute beauty.

But more importantly, in beholding the absolutely beautiful, the philosopher distinguishes the idea from "objects that participate in it," and this of course is our signal that we are dealing with a *mimesis*. We already know from the discussion of Book X that ideas are originals and objects are copies of the ideas. For us to say that this is the sense in which objects "participate" in the forms is not a new interpretation: Aristotle seems to have thought as much when he wrote that "the Pythagoreans said that things are in imitation of numbers, and Plato changed the word to participation."⁷⁹

Philosophical understanding involves a contemplation of knowledge, yet it is not objective knowledge. It is instead an assimilation to the nature of knowledge, a real identification with the One, the singular, with God the king and the natural author of everything. In precisely this sense, philosophical understanding involves a contemplation of Being, and through that contemplation, by means of a process of assimilation, philosophical contemplation amounts to an achievement of Being for the philosopher, a merging of his or her existence with absolute Being. In short, philosophical understanding involves moving from the realm of imitations to the realm of the original: In the first place, Plato writes, "those who see the absolute and eternal and immutable

may be said to know, and not to have opinion only” (480e6-8); in the second place, he adds, “the copy is to the original as the sphere of opinion is to the sphere of knowledge” (510a8).

Philosophical knowledge, “seeing the absolute,” Plato describes as assimilation with the beloved. Opinion is imitative, knowledge is originary, and the philosophical life involves moving from the sphere of influence that rules over the visible to the sphere of influence ruling over the intelligible: “...there are two ruling powers, and one of them is set over the intellectual world, the other over the visible” (509d2). The achievement of philosophical understanding thus involves a political realignment, a switch in political loyalties, from domain of the mimetician to the kingdom of the good. And this movement from the sphere of imitation to the sphere of the original Plato refers to as dialectics itself.⁸⁰

Finally, there can be no doubt that Plato has conceived of the goal of philosophy as a form of assimilation, that is, as a *mimesis*. Within the single image of the philosopher who has reached the end of his journey, Plato brings together the elements of legitimate lineage, the rejection of multiplicity to the benefit of singularity, the love of unity, and the transformation of his very being.

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 987B.

⁸⁰ Cf. 511a2-b7: “...the soul is compelled to use hypotheses;...employing the objects of which the shadows below are resemblances in their turn as images, they having in relation to the shadows and reflections of them a greater distinctness....[and] that other sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic, using the hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses—that is to say, as steps and points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses, in order that she may soar beyond them to the first principle of the whole....”

...the true lover of knowledge is always striving after being—that is his nature; he will not rest in the multiplicity of individuals which is an appearance only, but will go on—the keen edge will not be blunted, nor the force of his desire abate until he have attained the knowledge of the true nature of every essence by a sympathetic and kindred power in the soul, and by that power drawing near and mingling and becoming incorporate with very being, having begotten mind and truth, he will have knowledge and will live and grow truly, and then, and not till then, will he cease from his travail. (490a6-b7)

So we should ask again, is the idea of *mimesis* consistent with the ideal of the good citizen? Is it consistent with the ideal of philosophical understanding? As I hope to have shown by now, despite his criticism of *mimesis*, Plato conceptualizes his own project, the production of philosophical knowledge, in terms that are analogous to those of the production of mimetic illusions, if they are not downright *imitative* of them.

That the anti-mimetic philosophy *par excellence* should itself turn out to be an imitation of *mimesis* is enough of a paradox, but things get even more strange, when we consider not just if the philosopher is to have anything to do with *mimesis*, but also whether the ideal city, founded on the expulsion of the mimetic artists, does not make use of a *mimesis* particular to its own goals. The answer, of course, is that it does, and herein lies the real paradox of Plato's political project. The guardians, as we are about to see, are both mimetic art as well as mimetic artists. That they are imitations of original models we have already seen in the context of the philosopher's relation to Being. But politically speaking, the guardians are also nothing more than replicas of an original ideal:

He whose mind is fixed upon true being, ... his eye is ever directed towards things fixed and immutable, which he sees neither injuring nor injured by one another, but all in order moving according to reason; these he imitates,

and to these he will, as far as he can, conform himself. Can a man help imitating that with which he holds reverential converse?....And the philosopher holding converse with the divine order, becomes orderly and divine, as far as the nature of man allows.... (500c2-d2)

The philosopher is a “human being who in word and work is perfectly molded, as far as he can be, into the proportion and likeness of virtue” (498e2). Thus far it is clear that he or she is, technically speaking, no different from a table or a chair modeled in proportion and likeness of its own ideal form.

When Plato raises the question of how “States or individuals will ever attain perfection,” and answers this with the famous dictum that either philosophers must be kings or kings philosophers, we are dealing with a nothing short of a call for a mimetic transfiguration of the political reality of his day. After all, what other basis does Plato suggest for achieving the goal of producing a body of citizens willing to obey the philosophical ruler?⁸¹

What means does he suggest for accomplishing that goal, that is, other than the double *mimesis* whereby “the guardians must themselves obey the laws...they must imitate the spirit of them in any details which are entrusted to their care” (458c2-4), and the rather more awesome move by which rulers take possession of their subjects and transform them into their own image? The guardian is a mimetic artist with respect to the city that, as Plato puts it, bears the same image as he. It is worth repeating this passage in full:

⁸¹ Cf. 502b3-8: “let there be one man who has a city obedient to his will, and he might bring into existence the ideal polity....the ruler may impose the laws and institutions

And if a necessity be laid upon him of fashioning, not only himself, but human nature generally, whether in States or individuals, into that which he beholds elsewhere, will he think you, be an unskillful artificer of justice, temperance, and every civil virtue?....Will the world disbelieve us, when we tell them that no State can be happy which is not designed by artists who imitate the heavenly pattern?....Philosophers will begin by taking the State and the manners of men, from which as from a tablet, they will rub out the picture, and leave a clean surface....they will have nothing to do wither with individual or State, and will inscribe no laws, until they have either found, or themselves made, a clean surface....Having effected this, they will proceed to trace an outline of the constitution... And when they are filling in the work, as I conceive, they will often turn their eyes upwards and downwards: I mean that they will first look at absolute justice and beauty and temperance, and again at the human copy; and will mingle and temper the various elements of life into the image of a man; and thus they will conceive according to that other image, which when existing among men, Homer calls the form and likeness of God. (500d3-501b6)

This is an unexpected return to Homer. It is indeed a Homeric image that forms the ultimate, “absolute” form of justice. The political moment that precedes philosophical knowledge of the political (herein lies the paradox) is a mimetic moment. That is, the philosopher-king is a “painter of constitutions” (501c6), and he imitates God (the Homeric *theoikeles*, “godlike”) in himself and in a “picture,” that is, he makes an imitation of God in his subjects. He has already undergone a similar process of assimilation to the absolute by virtue of his desire for the Absolute. The subjects undergo their own *mimesis*, perhaps as the fulfillment of desire, but certainly in accordance with the mimetic formation of character that we see described at the end of Book II.

At 484, Plato asks:

which we have been describing, and the citizens may possibly be willing to obey them."

And are not those who are verily and indeed wanting in the knowledge of the true being of each thing, and who have in their souls no clear pattern, and are unable as with a painter's eye to look at the absolute truth and to that original to repair, and having perfect vision of the other world to order the laws about beauty, goodness, justice in this, if not already ordered, and to guard and preserve the order of them....are not such persons blind?

Those who are *not* imitations, that is, who have not been impressed upon by what is called here "absolute truth," who subsequently have no pattern of perfection within them, those who do not imitate "beauty, goodness, justice" must be kept away from political power. How far we have come from the first position Plato takes, according to which those whose being is constituted through imitation are to be expelled outright! In fact, it turns out, the debate over the value of *mimesis* was never about whether or not *mimesis* should be permitted in the ideal city. That is Plato's language, to be sure, but beneath his inflammatory rhetoric, Plato never for a moment considers that social order could be established by any means other than through the production of political subjects by means of imitation and assimilation to philosophical models of singularity, univocality, and identity. In the end, whether we like it or not, we will assimilate to whoever holds the reins. That is why Plato is so vociferous in his attack on the poets—they are simply his competitors for control over the production of ideal citizens:

We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their own soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason. (401b7-d2)

The nature of the philosopher, Plato tells us, is to grasp the eternal, to have in his soul a clear pattern, and to repair his distorted soul by comparing it with an “original,” as a painter would copy a model in order to create a pattern on his canvas. This I think is both a *mimesis* and an anti-*mimesis* on the part of the philosopher. It is clearly a *mimesis*, insofar as the philosopher *copies* the original. It is an anti-*mimesis*, insofar as the philosopher is attracted to that which is *original*. But then again, it is a *mimesis*, insofar as the philosopher is *drawn* toward the original, and assimilates to it.

Summary

A close reading of the text reveals that Plato does not live up to his reputation as the philosopher of indestructible individuality, of the self-same citizen who speaks and acts in his own person. Prior to making an archetypal region of universal truths the ruling and form-giving ideal of bodies both political and individual, Plato had established the idea of a person as a sea of personalities and as the materialization of ghost-like, floating images. What is susceptible in the first place to anchoring in the singularity of philosophical self-knowledge is just such a phantasmic person. That is why I say that Plato’s most powerful achievement in the *Republic* is the “impressionization of the self.” The singular person who speaks in his or her own voice, the political subject who is attached to his or her own place in the social and political hierarchy of the beloved city, indeed the very notion of attachment itself, all that arises out of and cannot exist in the Platonic world without a prior explosion of the idea of a self into unanchored multiple personality. Plato’s argument in favor of political power grounded by the anchor of

universal truth takes place both against and through the figure of the impressionistic self, since this self-without-boundaries characterizes both the mimetician, enemy of the state, as well as an important part of the singularity of each ideal citizen. In other words, Plato represents the ideal citizen's singularity as the result of forces that are identical to the ones he uses to describe the ways in which people lose themselves in the world of phantasms. Paradoxically, the legitimate city, which depends on the inhabitation of distinct economic and political class positions by individuated citizens, depends equally on an originary moment of utter self-loss.

This chapter thus contributes to the general project of the dissertation, by accomplishing a kind of return of self-loss to its constitutive place in the history of theorizing political legitimacy. As much as political legitimacy may be conceived in terms of an affinity or attachment to government and citizenship that each citizen "has," selflessness is ultimately what makes political legitimacy conceivable. Even where political legitimacy depends on the consent of the governed, it must not be imagined that individual consent is the binary opposite of self-loss. What I hope to have shown through my reading of the *Republic* is the paradoxical relationship between individualist forms of political citizenship and forms of self-loss in the image of individualized identity that make it possible.

In the next chapter, "The Phantasmic Origins of Sovereignty," I explicate Hobbes' characterization of sovereign power as an artificial person by uncovering the source of Hobbes' notion of artificiality in the Platonic idea of self-loss in general and *mimesis* in particular. It becomes clear when we read Hobbesian artificiality in light of

Platonic *mimesis* that the state is said to be artificial less as a result of the transfer of natural rights from subject to representative, than to what Hobbes calls a “perpetual embrace” in which each member loses its identity in the other. Artificiality, in other words, is more than a merely juridical concept: it is Hobbes’ way of characterizing the foundation of the state as a great moment of self-loss. Though Hobbes is widely considered as having inaugurated the modern, liberal, individualistic conception of the self, his true achievement lies in the account of mimetic deindividuation or self-loss that he lays at the foundation of the modern state.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PHANTASMIC ORIGINS OF SOVEREIGNTY

Introduction

In the last chapter, I made the case for giving the theme of self-loss a central part in the theorization of political legitimacy by revealing the extent to which *mimesis* is integral to Plato's philosophy of political citizenship. In this chapter, I pursue the same course, but through an interpretation of Hobbes' philosophy of political sovereignty. Hobbes describes the political sovereign as an artificial person. I explicate Hobbes' notion of artificiality by uncovering its source in the Platonic idea of *mimesis* and self-loss in general. For Hobbes, as for Plato, self-loss is a constitutive part of the formation of political identity. Yet important commentators as different from each other as Hanna Pitkin and Michel Foucault still agree that when Hobbes writes that sovereign power is an artificial person, what he means by "artificial" is simply an entity to which one has transferred one's natural rights.⁸² It becomes clear when we read Hobbesian artificiality in light of Platonic *mimesis* however, that artificiality does not only pertain to the transfer of natural rights from individual subjects to their representative. Better, the transfer of natural rights from subject to representative consists in what Hobbes calls a "perpetual

⁸² Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972), pp. 2-37; Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books 1980), pp. 97-98.

embrace” in which each participant loses its identity in the other. Artificiality, I argue, is more than a matter of giving up something one possesses: it is Hobbes’ way of saying that we *become* possessed in the very fact of our political sovereignty.

Contrary to the interpretations of Foucault and Pitkin, who read Hobbes only through *Leviathan*, traces of self-loss persist in Hobbes’ philosophy of matter, motion, mind, perception and political power throughout the two decades that culminated in the publication of his most famous work, and beyond: in *A Short Tract on First Principles* (c.1630), *Thomas White’s De Mundo Examined* (1643), *Leviathan* (1651), and *De Corpore* (1655). In the works prior to the publication of *Leviathan*, as well as in *De Corpore*, cognitive abilities such as reasoning, understanding and discourse are all said to have their source in “phantasmes” and “apparitions” that take possession of the mind and of all human experiences through the imagination. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes brings his political philosophy to a climax in a theory that derives sovereignty from the assimilation of multiple human beings, imaginations in full play, to the singular, irresistible idea of an all-powerful overlord. This is no merely contractual theory that conceives of the state as the representative of the subjects’ will; Hobbes’ political thought recasts in a modern shape the ancient and medieval notion that a sovereign’s person mimetically embodies the collective.

If it were indeed the case that for Hobbes, *mimesis* is constitutive of political sovereignty, it would be to the detriment of the belief that the right of governments to rule rests with the consent of self-possessed individuals. In fact, Hobbes does theorize the legitimacy of political representation as a reciprocally interimplicating experience of

imitation, rapture and possession between subjects and the state. Thus this chapter contributes to the main thrust of the dissertation in two ways: first, through an elucidation of Hobbes' critique of any strict differentiation between experience and cognition, I amplify what it means to think of political legitimacy as a condition whereby the *experience of power makes sense*. Second, out of the contention that experiences of power can become meaningful even without foundationalizing experience in autonomy and consent, my engagement with Hobbes contributes to the conceptualization of alternatives to theories regarding the relationship between state, choice and power based on the autonomy and consent of self-same political actors.

The Leviathan's Two Bodies: Juridical and Mimetic Sovereignty

Think of the scheme of Leviathan: insofar as he is a fabricated man, Leviathan is no other than the amalgamation of a certain number of separate individualities, who find themselves reunited by the complex of elements that go to compose the State; but at the heart of the State, or rather, at its head, there exists something which constitutes it as such, and this is sovereignty, which Hobbes says is precisely the spirit of Leviathan.⁸³

The first part of this brief remark by Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* coheres neatly with a traditional reading of Hobbes: *Leviathan* can be understood as an attempt to articulate the relationship between political sovereignty and atomistic individualism, as an attempt to erect the theoretical edifice of contract-based political obligation over the

⁸³ Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," pp. 97-98.

twin pillars of autonomy and rationality, both of which are said to constitute not just individuality but human nature as such. Furthermore, Hobbes was a methodological individualist, for whom the best form of political power could be deduced from the nature of its parts. As Foucault puts it, the aim of *Leviathan* is the theoretical “distillation of a single will...from the particular wills of a multiplicity of individuals,” and Hobbes did not see it necessary to view individuality itself as the product of other, more constitutive elements. For Hobbes, it would appear, the rational, autonomous individual is just that, in-dividual, self-contained.

The second part of Foucault’s commentary, of course, speaks directly to his “inversion” of Hobbes’ discourse of political right: Let us not conceptualize political power as something that descends upon individual subjects from the “lofty isolation” of the uniform edifice of the state. Instead, Foucault urges us to conduct an “ascending analysis of power,” asking how multiple forms of subjugation take place “at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors....” (97) Far from claiming that power manifests in the “head” of the body politic, in its reasons, conscious aims and stated purposes, Foucault’s analysis has a distinctly leveling effect. It directs our sight to the entire organism, to the body politic as a whole, to the single entity performing multiple roles all at once, from chief to footman, each one is seen equally as cause and effect of power. The proper question for Foucault, then, is how each part of the social body is assigned a position in its functional entirety—and thus the proper object of analysis is not the administrative and official apparatus of the state, not the courts and legislatures, but the distinct subject-

positions that constitute the body politic as a singular whole, and biological bodies as individual political subjects. As Foucault says, let us study power at “the point where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application...where it installs itself and produces its real effects” (97). And this point of application, both “immanent” and “constitutive,” it is nowhere else than right here, exactly where I’m looking, in the face that is my own: “we should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects” (97).

Foucault, who saw his own work as being “the exact opposite of Hobbes’,” belongs to the dominant school of thought, which holds that Hobbes’ philosophy, in particular his notion of representation, announces the founding of modern, rational-individualist political theory. Hobbes supplants the medieval, *mimetic* notion of the sovereign’s person embodying the collective in a quasi-mystical form with the modern principle of *mediation* inherent in contractual political theory, according to which legitimate governments are conceived as the designated representatives of the subjects’ will.⁸⁴ From this point of view, Hobbes’ modernity is to be located precisely in the turn from *mimesis* to mediation, and he achieves this end by means of two interrelated, quintessentially modern feats. One achievement is the hypostasis of the idea of a person into a deliberative individual, into “a fixed being who, as source of all action and knowledge, could be interpellated as founder of the contractual state.”⁸⁵ The other

⁸⁴ On the shift from *mimesis* to mediation in the concept of representation, see Pitkin, pp. 4, 7.

⁸⁵ Christopher Pye, *The Regal Phantasm* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 3-4.

achievement is the theorization of “the distinctly modern idea of the State as a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and constituting the supreme authority within a certain defined territory.”⁸⁶ Autonomous and rational individuals transfer their natural right to self-governance and agglomerate it in a semi-fictional entity, which Hobbes calls *Leviathan* or a commonwealth; this entity is said to possess legitimate power over each individual, as long as it maintains their security under the aegis of a single, representative sovereign power. According to this scheme, power returns to those individuals in a form that at once guarantees and threatens their identity as autonomous and rational: Legitimate political power guarantees the identity of autonomous and rational individuals because the bearer of that power is also their representative; it threatens them because the power of political subjects takes the alienated form of their own representative. Thus Hobbes produces the chief problematic of modern political liberalism.⁸⁷

Yet in attributing Hobbes’ modernity to his turn towards mediation—or representation—away from *mimesis*, commentators such as Hanna Pitkin unwittingly place him in the decidedly ambiguous position of possessing both modern and ancient attitudes. Instead of inaugurating the modern era of political thought, Hobbes’ turn away from *mimesis* would confirm his place in an anti-mimetic tradition dating from the

⁸⁶ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), ii, p. 353.

⁸⁷ Torben Bech Dyrberg characterizes Hobbes’ invention of this scheme as the “inauguration of the modern conception of the relation between power and authority.” See Dyrberg, *The Circular Structure of Power* (London and New York: Verso 1997), p. 186.

inception of political philosophy in Plato's *Republic*. Furthermore, there are in fact two versions of representation in Hobbes' political theory. One is juridical, a matter of mediation; the other actually is mimetic. In a study of Hobbes' theorization of the theatrical origins of power in *Leviathan*, Christopher Pye has shown that, far from suggesting any such shift from *mimesis* to mediation in the concept of political representation, Hobbes' account of sovereignty actually "converges with the affective tradition from which it seems to depart." As Pye has pointed out, "if sovereignty appears in 'lofty'—and fearful—'isolation' in Hobbes' *Leviathan*, the body politic retains an affective, as well as a juridical force, "informing the natural body like a "*deus absconditus*," like a hidden god.

In other words, although Hobbes argues that a commonwealth should be represented *by* a sovereign power, a power that includes but which is not limited to police, armed forces and prisons, he also conceives the formation of the body politic itself in terms that involve neither mediation-representative nor coercive notions of power. Instead of mediation-representation and coercion, Hobbes describes the generation of the commonwealth itself in strictly constitutive terms: This is the "hidden" face of power, hidden because with it Hobbes accounts for the *a priori* condition of possibility for the legitimate exercise of force by the coercive apparatus of the modern representative state, and hidden also because within it lies the evidence of Hobbes' strong ties to the affective tradition from which he putatively departs.

Let us briefly trace the outlines of Pye's reading of Hobbes' affective theory of power.⁸⁸ The concept of sovereign authority arises in *Leviathan* because of the need for a "visible Power" to bind the subjects to "the common Benefit."⁸⁹ Though Hobbes claims that the sovereign representative truly embodies the wills of subjects as a result of their transfer of natural right to it, he undermines the entire logic of this exchange because the figure of the sovereign is also said to exceed the power of those who author it. At the precise moment when subjects transfer their natural right to the sovereign, they simultaneously become the *awed* spectators of their own creation, and it is the spectacular nature of authority more than anything else that accounts for its ability to establish peace. Hobbes' discourse of political sovereignty reduces sovereignty to its visible aspect, to its spectacular and thus affective power over the individuals who simultaneously authorize sovereign power and are authorized by it by virtue of its power of *entrancement*:

Traced to this ambiguous moment where the subject becomes the awed spectator to his own creation, Hobbes' theory of political origins suggests that throughout the Renaissance sovereign power arose out of the exorbitancy of the theatrical itself; for Hobbes the proto-modernist, sovereignty is an irreducibly theatrical phenomenon. (86)

When Hobbes formulates the origins of the commonwealth, the figure of the sovereign authority whose "visible Power" serves to keep self-interest in check equally provides a unified "Person" and coherent will that would be otherwise lacking. Hobbes opens the way for the articulation of a democratic orientation for political representation,

⁸⁸ For the following analysis of *Leviathan*, see Christopher Pye, "The Sovereign, the Theater, and the Kingdome of Darknesse: Hobbes and the Spectacle of Power," in *Representations*, No. 8. (Autumn, 1984), pp. 84-106.

⁸⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 109.

but the point is that it is the unity, not the terrorizing force, of authority that secures concord:

And be there never so great a Multitude; yet if their actions be directed according to their particular judgments, and particular appetites, they can expect thereby no defence, nor protection, neither against a Common enemy, nor against the injuries of one another. For being distracted in opinions concerning the best use and application of their strength, they do not help, but hinder one another; and reduce their strength by mutual opposition to nothing: whereby they are easily, not only subdued by a very few that agree together; but also when there is no common enemy, they make war upon each other for their particular interests. (107)

The force of the body politic derives not so much from the juridical transfer of power to it, as from its ability to represent the plural power of the state in an integral form.⁹⁰ The strength of the commonwealth depends on its ability to represent the multiplicity of its participants in “one Will”:

The only way to erect such a common power...is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will....This is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, *I authorise and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner.* This done, the multitude so united in one person is called a COMMONWEALTH, in Latin CIVITAS. This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that *Mortal God* to which we owe, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence. (109)

On the one hand, the person who legally represents a united multitude is generated in the transfer of right as expressed by the covenant—this is Hobbes’

⁹⁰ Pye, “The Sovereign, the Theater, and the Kingdome of Darknesse: Hobbes and the Spectacle of Power,” p. 89.

“juridical” theory of sovereignty, and Foucault rejects it precisely because it equates power with the “strength” of the representative to whom “my right of governing myself” has been transferred. On the other hand, the covenant simultaneously achieves another, more subtle aim: at the same time as I transfer my natural rights to the representative, I also become “really united” with a multitude of others in a single body capable of being represented in the first place. In other words, the governing apparatus does not represent me *tout court*. It represents me only insofar as I am something other than a natural individual, only insofar as I belong to the collective body, insofar as I have given myself over to what Hobbes calls the “mortal God” or commonwealth. The incorporating dimension of representation corresponds to the meaning of *mimesis* in Book X of Plato’s *Republic*: *mimesis* as theatrical entrancement. Mimetic representation relates to juridical representation as its condition of possibility: the transfer of right occurs “as if every man should say to every man” that each one belongs to the collective body. Within this “as if,” where the covenant is revealed as a purely hypothetical event; collective body of the sovereign is formed, but as a purely hypothetical event; it is truly a “hidden god.”

Despite Foucault’s attempt to distance himself from *Leviathan*, Hobbes’ theorization of sovereignty involves a concept of representation that is simultaneously juridical and constitutive. In its strictly constitutive aspect, the concept of representation designates nothing other than “subjection in its material instance as a constitution of

subjects.”⁹¹ Representation, in short, does not begin and end with the transfer of natural right; it is also matter of acquiring another self.

And so it would also seem that Hobbes has not disowned entirely the view that sovereignty counts as a possessive power, a mimetic power in the sense of Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. Echoing Plato’s description of the entrancing influence wielded by actors over their audiences, Hobbes alleges that the awesome and terrifying power of the spectacle of sovereignty transforms its authors into creatures, “as if they were possessed by the devil.”⁹² Thus the sovereign doesn’t just assume the power to “form the wills” of his subjects as the result of a voluntary contract between men: Ultimately, as Pye says, Hobbes conceptualizes the subject as the creature of the sovereign:

Hobbes’ claim that the figure who merely represents the subject supersedes his power suggests that the theatrical transference which institutes the sovereign also institutes the subject—that the subject first comprehends himself figured in the external and irreducibly theatrical person of the “Artificial “Man””; the spectator...is subjected by the terror he feels before a form which represents his power and agency in a fundamentally alien and derivative form. (101)

When Pye says that “the spectator...is subjected by the terror” of the sovereign, the conclusion one must draw is that Hobbesian *mimesis* loosens the boundaries between self and government, and actually confounds the relationship between subject and representative. That is, Hobbes’ theory of contract-based political legitimacy paradoxically erodes the distinction between the origins and the effects of power; social pacts are antecedent to the authority that institutes them. The subject would have to

⁹¹ Foucault, p. 97.

⁹² Cf. Pye, pp. 93-95. Pye cites Hobbes’ analysis of pagan theater in *Leviathan*, p. 660.

accept that the sovereign figure whom he authorizes constitutes him as its author. In other words, the representative must be seen to form the will that institutes it.

As Pye notes, understanding sovereignty in spectacular terms involves “something of a reversal of our current notion of the theater’s role in relation to the subject.” Yet ever since Plato, he says, has the theater been associated with the question of the state. In the previous chapter, as we saw, the theater appeared to Plato as a serious threat to the integrity of the body politic:

Few persons ever reflect, as I should imagine, that from the evil of other men something of evil is communicated to themselves...the same holds also of the ridiculous...having stimulated the risible faculty at the theater, you are betrayed unconsciously to yourself into playing the comic poet at home. (606b5-d5)

Pye traces the lineage of Hobbes’ theory of sovereignty back to Book X of Plato’s *Republic*. But Hobbes’ thinking about the distinction between natural and artificial persons lies rather closer to the analysis of narrative in Book III of Plato’s *Republic*. Recall that according to Plato, the difference between *mimesis* and *haple diegesis* or “simple” narration is that in the latter, one speaks in one’s own voice, while in the former, one speaks in the voice of another:

[In simple narration], the poet is speaking in his own person; he never leads us to suppose that he is any one else....But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?...And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character he assumes....and in this case the narrative or the poet may be said to proceed by way of imitation. (393a5-c7)

Pye's analysis of *Leviathan* rests solely on the presence of the sovereign as if it were an actor on stage: "Merely to gaze on the monarchic body, to discern it as a distinct form, was to renew the split inhabiting one's own being, and to conjure one's own origins in a divided and alien form—in spectacle." The connection with only the theatrical aspect of *mimesis* is undoubtedly correct as far as it goes, but it misses the importance of *mimesis* in other parts of Hobbes' political philosophy, in particular his philosophy of the body and of perception, neither of which is especially spectacular in nature.

Hobbes' Mimetic Materialism

Never does the soul think without phantasm.⁹³

Hobbes believed that the universe is a great continuum of matter, devoid of spirit, a chain of bodies set in motion by other bodies. The traditional reading of Hobbes says that he was thus a materialist, considering reality to consist of nothing but matter in motion.⁹⁴ It is true that Hobbes postulated two fundamental categories of bodies: those "which hath power to move" and those "which hath power to be moved."⁹⁵ In distinguishing between bodies that move and bodies that are moved, Hobbes pretty much followed the Scholastic doctrine, which laid down as the categorical distinction between beings, *substance* and *accident*: substance denoting the permanent, unchanging

⁹³ Aristotle, *De Anima* III 7, 8.

⁹⁴ For the standard interpretation of Hobbes' materialism, see Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

substratum of things, the material in which modifications take place; accident referring to the ever-changing properties that inhere in substance, such as color, sound, taste, and so on. But it is not in the first place the mutability of matter that interests Hobbes: he seems to have been drawn initially to the notion that *substance is that which subsists in itself, and accident as that which cannot exist except in a substance that has it as its property*. In *A Short Tract on First Principles*, Hobbes writes that “substance is that which hath being not in another, so as it may be of it self... Accident is that which hath being in another, so as, without that other it could not be... every thing that hath a being in Nature, hath it either in another, or not in another...” (194) In Hobbes’ usage, then, the critical difference between substance and accident lies along a *mimetic* axis, in the specifically Platonic sense: whether something “has its being” in itself or in another is precisely how Plato determined the difference between philosophical and mimetic being.

Again, following Scholastic usage, Hobbes uses the Latin terms *ens* and *esse* to differentiate between substance and accident. As words for “being,” *ens* is normally understood as a noun, as “a being,” while *esse* is understood as the verb “to be.” Hobbes simply claims that “to be” is also a noun, a noun describing the fact that a being always has certain properties:

esse [the verb “to be”] is indeed a noun. For example, in this proposition: ‘To be a man is to be an animal’, [the] word *esse*, both in ‘to be a man’ and in ‘to be an animal’, is a noun....those who query the truth of these

⁹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *A Short Tract on First Principles*, Appendix I to Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, second edition, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.: 1969), p. 193.

words must enquire not only what ‘man’ and ‘animal’ are the names of, but also what that ‘to be an animal’ is the name of....⁹⁶

In other words, *esse* refers to “nothing but an *accident* of a body by which the means of perceiving it is determined and signaled” (312). The crucial point is that Hobbes does not mean to draw our attention to what accidents are the names of: what “man” is, what “animal” is. Instead, he is trying to get us to understand that what the verb “to be” names, existence, is itself accidental. *Ens*, substance, *a being*, refers to something “that occupies space, or which can be measured as to length, breadth and depth” (311). An *ens* can be “a man, an animal, a tree, a stone, in fact...any object at all” (310). *Ens* is the name of that which exists. So too, the word *esse*, “being,” is also a name of something, but of existence, not that which exists, not of substance but of accident:

So *esse* is the same thing as *accident*....*accident* is the same as *existence*, and *ens* as *that which exists*.... (311)

The definition of *esse* as both existence and accident leads Hobbes to the identification of “existence” with that “which hath being in another.” To be means: to have being in another.

The most important point to grasp in Hobbes’ materialism is that the universe consists of two distinct classes of thing: substance and accident; that which has being in itself, and that which has being in another; that which exists (*ens*), and existence (*esse*).

⁹⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, trans. Harold Whitmore Jones, (London: Bradford University Press, 1976), p. 311.

In fact, though this position seems to correspond with Aristotle's *Categories*,⁹⁷ Hobbes also notes that the distinction between substance and accident in his own philosophy coheres with the Platonic distinction between that which exists and that which appears: "Rightly, then, did Plato distinguish between two kinds of thing: one, namely *to on*, he said existed but did not come into being; the other *to einai*, did not exist but did come into being" (313). It is this connection with Plato that I think is most illuminating in Hobbes' philosophy.

For Plato, it was possible to grasp the essence of selfhood only after he had reduced the idea of a person to its mimetic elements, to the reduplication of impersonal mythical forms reverberating through the generations and between the citizens of the body politic. It is, paradoxically, precisely in this Platonic sense that Hobbes is a materialist. Despite his use of Aristotelian and Scholastic vocabulary, Hobbes doesn't really have much to say about substance, about that which has its being in itself. Hobbes accepts axiomatically that the universe consists of both bodies and the accidents by which they are perceived. Therefore, as long as there are perceptions, Hobbes simply assumes that somewhere there is a perceived entity "which hath being not in another."

Hobbes let the objective world slip away from our grasp, but not to suggest a sense of uncertainty about it. Hobbesian philosophy is not meant to rebut a Cartesian doubt about the reality of things or about the possibility of certain knowledge about anything. Instead, Hobbes' philosophical point is to say what it *means* to be, and what it *means* to know anything. And it is the Platonic world of appearances, of pure flux and

⁹⁷ Cf. Hobbes, p. 57.

reflux, of eternal generation and decay that Hobbes adopts as his sphere of investigation and explication of the meaning of these things.

As Hobbes notes, nothing can move itself (317), thus motion has no origin, it always comes from somewhere else; as he wrote in *Thomas White's De Mundo*

Examined:

We can conceive of only one efficient cause that sets in motion any body initially at rest: the motion of an adjacent body. As the commencement of motion is the quitting of place, we can see that the only reason why a body leaves its place is that another body standing adjacent replaces the first by moving forward. If this happens, the first body must recede into another position, i.e. it must be moved....(321)

The human body, like any other body found in nature, cannot move itself, but it does possess the power to be moved; like all animal bodies, it moves when touched by external objects. In short, what it means to know anything, and what it means to be at all, is: to be moved. Being touched gives rise to perception of the world, because the motion of external objects creates a disturbance within the internal organs:

...every perception [*sensio*] is brought about by the action of objects, in the following way: vision when the motion from a shining or illuminated body is continually propagated through a medium from part to part, through the eye as far as the brain, and even to the heart itself. (331)

Perception occurs when an external body contacts the sensory apparatus with “somewhat issuing from it self, which thing so issuing lett be call’d Species.”⁹⁸ Deep within the human body, the species of a foreign object touches and “qualifies” the brain with the “power to produce the similitude of those objects whence they issue” (205).

⁹⁸ Hobbes, *First Principles*, p. 197.

Thus not only is every perception a “motion in the parts of the animal’s body,”⁹⁹ but every perception is also a “reproduction” of the external world, what Hobbes calls a “similitude” or “phantasma”:

A Phantasma is an Action of the brayne on the Animal spirits by the power it receiveth from externall sensible things. A Phantasma must be produced by some Agent; but not Agent can produce the similitude of another, unless it be qualified by that other... therefore it must be produced originally by the Species of that object, and that eyther immediately or mediately by the brayne qualified with like power from the Species.... A Phantasma therefore is the Action of the object.¹⁰⁰

With the introduction of a foreign species to our internal organs, that species “is reproduced [*procreati*] and sent back, by the reaction and resistance of the heart, to the outer limits of the animal [concerned], and such motions constitute impressions [*phantasmata*] which seem to be external [to the body] and which, if they are to do with vision, for instance, we call light or color....”¹⁰¹

If induced through the eye, the phantasm is called light or color; if through the ears, sound; if through the nostrils, scent; if through the tongue, taste; if through the surface of the body only, it is called hot or cold, rough or smooth; and so on (336):

... a sound is the fantasy of the motion by which an object acts on the organs of hearing; and as regards our sense of smell, a scent is the fantasy or manifestation of the motion of the object that acts on our sense of smell.
(52)

There is nothing that I can perceive of the world that is not a fantasy or phantasm, a similitude or copy of it produced by the brain when touched by the species of a foreign

⁹⁹ Hobbes, *De Mundo Examined*, p. 331.

¹⁰⁰ Hobbes, *First Principles*, p. 206.

object. It is, in short, the brain, and “not the things themselves,” that makes the realm of external objects what it is: that colorful, noisy, smelly, and textured place we call the world (338).

The point of all this is that an object of knowledge is not, strictly speaking, a being that exists. As Hobbes puts it, “the mind-picture of body is the same as our knowledge of an existing body”:

Where the object lies, however, we find neither the image nor even its constituent shape. The apparent area of the seen or of any other object is therefore not inherent in the object itself but is merely imaginary. For how can the circle of the sun, which seems so small and so near, be a quantity inherent in, and equal in magnitude to [*adequatus*], an object as remote and as vast as that of the body of the sun? (40)

In other words, an object of knowledge is not to be identified with a body, with a certain *ens*. All we ever perceive is the likeness of a world, we are blind with respect to that which exists; all we see is the image of a world that must remain hidden. Every sensory experience is only apparent, what Hobbes calls fantasy or “fancy,” and it is the nature of human beings to make the fundamental error of mistaking what they perceive for what is really out there:

...fancy...is none other than a motion in the brain, but yet appears as something external, making us see things in places where they are not, such as stars beneath the water, and [hear] a voice where there is an echo. (365)

Yet for Hobbes, the error of taking the reflection of stars for the stars themselves, or a ventriloquized voice for the original, does not represent an aberration in the

¹⁰¹ Hobbes, *De Mundo Examined*, p. 331.

operation of the mind: it is rather the rule. The true error rather lies in *naming* that which one perceives as the thing itself:

Most students of philosophy call these images of this type *things*, inasmuch as the images exist in the mind, considering them as being the things themselves; so instead of saying 'the image of a thing' they say 'a thing in the imagination.' (52)

Hobbes would have us say "the image of a thing," since that is all we can be certain of in perception. When I approach a friend's house, it is not strictly speaking the front of the house that I see: it is rather a house-front that appears within me. I cannot know for sure that the house has a back, just as I cannot be certain that my friend is inside, though I can easily produce a "mind-picture" of my friend gardening in the back yard if that is where I expect to find him. Hobbes urges us to let go of the objective world, and in its place he leaves us with phantasms. My brain then takes over and puts things in space, gives them colors and smells, textures and taste. Once my brain has reproduced the world as a phantasm, the real world might as well not even be there anymore:

...just as one can remember the life-appearance of a man who died some time ago, so even if the whole world were destroyed except for one man, nothing would prevent this man from having an image of a world which he had once seen, that is, from visualizing a space extending from him in all directions as far as he wished. (40)

All the objects occupying space would be just as real to this last man as when the external world still existed: even before the annihilation of that world, all objects of knowledge were copies, impressions formed in the brain, artifacts of the imagination. What we know is never to be identified as what is really out there.

The world I see and feel around me, the world where bodies are in flux and constantly changing, it is not where I see and feel it to be, beyond me. Instead, the world I see and feel is right here, “in me,” it is a reproduction of the real world, which always remains hidden, unseen and ultimately unknown:

A mind picture derives from the action of some agent we suppose to exist, or to have existed, outside the mind of the person who imagines [something]....Hence a body is to ‘imaginary space’ as a thing to the knowledge of that thing, because our entire knowledge of existing things consists in that mind-picture produced by the action of these things on our senses. (40)

Hobbes allows the bodies that I expect to be there when my sensory apparatus is stimulated to fade away, because the objective world is not really necessary in order for knowledge or self-certitude to happen. Knowledge pertains only to what is present in the imagination; beyond the imagination, we cannot know anything for sure. *Ens*, that which exists, is beyond the sphere of knowledge; whatever it is that really exists, and whatever it is really doing, is unknown to us except as it appears, as it touches our sensory apparatus, only insofar as the brain is capable of producing a copy of it in the form of a similitude or phantasm. All that the appearance of something happening offers direct proof of is that *I* exist, and that my imaginative faculty is fully operative.¹⁰² In fact, the very idea of externality itself is imaginary, and so is the idea of something “happening”:

¹⁰² Hobbes concurred with Descartes’ reasoning in the *cogito*: “For from the fact that I think, or have an image (whether I am awake or dreaming), it can be inferred that I am thinking; for “I think” and “I am thinking” mean the same thing. And from the fact that I am thinking it follows that I exist, since that which thinks is not nothing.” See René Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991), pp. 122-123.

Space is the image of a body insofar as it is a body...hence it is clear that the existence of space depends not on the existence of body but on that of the imaginative faculty. (40)

If the nature of time consists in [time's] being some real succession, time would not exist. A real succession that has passed exists no more, because it has passed; and a future one does not yet exist, because it is a future one. There is no 'present' save the instant, in which there cannot possibly be a succession. It remains, then that time is not a motion in things themselves, outside the mind, but is mere imagination. (339)

The brain, to use Hobbes' image, amounts to a pool of liquid reflecting the surrounding world. The reflections, or phantasms, are ripples in the brain, they signify that the brain is in motion, that a pebble has been thrown into the water:

So, when a pebble is thrown into water, the water set in motion does not stop moving as soon as the pebble rests on the bottom. We must hold similar views concerning...motions aroused within the brain by objects; that is, these do not cease as soon as the object is removed or otherwise ceases to act. (366)

Multiple phantasms linger in the brain at once, and the succession of one image or phantasm after another constitutes what Hobbes calls "the discourse of the mind," a "whirling" of the brain caused as if somebody's finger were stirring up a bowl of water:

As in every liquid, so also in the motions of the mind it is reasonable to suppose that a part of that is moved shall draw an adjacent part. Just as, wherever you draw with your finger one portion of [a film of] water freely spread over a flat surface, the other parts also follow it; so one 'impression' arises from another, neighboring one. (367-368)

The brain is a mirror in which appears the face of the world: and "a face appearing in a mirror is imaginary and real at the same time: an imaginary face, truly, but a real 'imagination'; for the imagination is the real motion of the organ with which we imagine" (339). The brain in which the face of the world appears is truly in motion; yet

the motion that occurs within it is not, to be precise, the brain's motion. The world appearing in the organ of imagination inheres not in the brain but in the foreign species that disturbs it. Quite literally, the mind is the property of the world: "That accidents are present and inherent in bodies' must [be] understood...in the way that there is motion in a moved body" (311)

The mind, like all motion, has its being *elsewhere*:

Every act... may be understood as being generated or produced and then as passing away....we cannot however, see how such a coming-to-be and passing away of acts can be brought about except *by* some body and *in* some body. (314)

In what body does the liquid motion of the brain occur? The production of phantasms is according to Hobbes, *mimetic*: these phantasms are *copies of nature*. A body in motion is also a body in possession, insofar as no body can move itself, but is always qualified by the quality of another body that touches it. The motions of the imagining brain are not its own motions, but the motions of foreign species. Consisting of nothing but phantasms, mind must be understood to be a replica of nature and in possession by nature.

It is precisely in terms of possession or *rapture* that Hobbes characterizes the higher operations of the mind:

Neither do Voluptuous men neglect Philosophy, but onely because they know not how greate a pleasure it is to the Mind of Man to be ravished in the vigorous and perpetual embraces of the most beauteous World.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, Authors Epistle to the Reader.

Hobbes orients himself towards a “voluptuous,” intimate, conception of philosophy in order to explain not what the mind *is*, but what it *means* to philosophize, what it means to know, to reason, to have any kind of mental experience at all. On the one hand, and this is the usual reading of Hobbes’ materialism, philosophy is a mental activity arising out of the mechanisms of the brain when the sensory apparatus is moved by the action of external objects. The brain is susceptible to being moved just like any object in the world. On the other hand, nature’s embrace of the mind places it in a special class of things in the world, as opposed to things like rocks and trees which, though part of nature, cannot be said to be “embraced” by nature. In the dedicatory epistle of *De Corpore*, Hobbes exhorts his reader to take up philosophy in a specifically mimetic mode, because what it means to use one’s mind is to be embraced by nature, to reproduce foreign species, to reflect the external world:

Philosophy, therefore, the childe of the World and your own Mind, is within your self; perhaps not fashioned yet, but like the World its Father, as it was in the beginning, a thing confused. Do therefore as the Statuaries do, who by hewing off that which is superfluous, do not make but find the Image. Or imitate the Creation. If you will be a Philosopher in good earnest, let your Reason move upon the Deep of your own Cogitations and Experience.¹⁰⁴

That the mind is not an object like trees and stones is clear from Hobbes’ chosen metaphor for philosophy: the confused child, a lumped mass to be “hewed” by the power of the mind into what Hobbes calls “the Image.” It is not, moreover, that I form the confused body of my child into a replica of myself: philosophy is not self-expression. On the contrary, in producing philosophy, my mind brings forth something deeper and

heavier than myself: Hobbes exhorts his reader to imitate the Creation—“let your Reason move upon the Deep of your own Cogitations and experiences.” The mind belongs to nature as the *copy* of nature, as its replica, as its possession and as an impression of it: as what Plato called *tupos*. The mind and its activities belong to the material world as its offspring: philosophy, Hobbes says, is “the childe of the World.” It is not because the philosopher is able to establish a disinterested perspective upon the world that philosophy can take place. It is *rapture*, not *distance*, that enables philosophy—and all thought—to proceed: What it means to know—to have a mind even—is this: to be a child lost in the “perpetual embraces of the most beauteous World.”

The fundamental gesture of Hobbes’ philosophy—and this is the true gist of his materialism—is to demonstrate that the mind is by its very nature lost in the world. It is in order to suggest just how thoroughly the world saturates the mind, how impossible any distance is from the world, that Hobbes begins with what he calls the annihilation of the world: “In the Teaching of Naturall Philosophy, I cannot begin better...then from *Privation*, that is, from feigning the World to be annihilated.”¹⁰⁵ If the world were annihilated, Hobbes claims, it would nevertheless remain—as an image. By “feigning” the annihilation of the world, Hobbes leads us to the view that the nature is rather *in* the mind:

But if such annihilation of all things be supposed, it may perhaps be asked, what would remain for any Man (whom onely I except from this Universal annihilation of things) to consider as the Subject of Philosophy, or at all to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, II vii 1.

reason upon, or what to give Names unto for Ratiocinations sake...I say therefore there would remain to that man ideas of the World, and of all such Bodies as he had, before their annihilation, seen with his eies, or perceived by any other sense; that is to say, the Memory and Imagination of Magnitudes, Motions, Sounds, Colours, etc. as also of their order and parts. All which things though they be nothing but Ideas & Phantasms, happening internally to him that imagineth; yet they will appear as if they were external, and not at all depending upon any power of the Mind. (II vii 1)

The world would remain as an idea; indeed as far as human beings are concerned, the world *is* nothing but ideas or phantasms. It's not just that Hobbes believes us to be trapped in the region of appearances and wishes to lead us to things as they really are in themselves. The closest we ever come to things "as they really are" is precisely in the way they *appear to us*. This is Hobbes' *mimetic* materialism: materialist because the mind is a body in motion, mimetic in that the mind is an image of the world, its impression, its phantasm. The mind is like a mist hovering over the deep of nature, and it imitates the Creation by recreating the world in ideas.

What all of this means to Hobbes is that we can never possess any immediate knowledge or understanding of the natural order in itself. There is one exception to this rule, however. The one part of the natural world that does reveal itself as it is, not mediated by mental apparitions, is what Hobbes calls "apparition itself." In other words, nature shows us things, and these things are the phantasms or apparitions comprising the contents of our mind at all times. But more importantly, Hobbes understands nature as *that which shows us that it shows itself*. The view that the essence of nature lies in its *appearing* leads Hobbes to define science as a kind of phenomenology:

Seeing therefore the Science which is here taught, hath its Principles in the Appearances of Nature, and endeth in the attayning of some knowledge of Natural causes, I have given to this part, the title of PHYSIQUES, or the PHAENOMENA of NATURE. Now such things as *appear* or are *shewn* to us by Nature, we call *Phaenomena* or Appearances. (IV xxv 1)

Furthermore, nature-as-appearance does not exist somewhere “out there” along with the objects that comprise the natural order of things. Those objects are always only grasped indirectly, through the phenomena that impress our senses. As that which shows us that it shows itself, we can grasp nature directly, in itself, precisely because it is not “out there” at all, but rather is “in here,” right where I’m looking. The living mind is really nature showing that it shows itself:

Of all the *Phaenomena*, or *Appearances* which are near us, the most admirable is *Apparition* itself, [*to phainesthai*]; namely, that some Natural Bodies have in themselves the patterns almost of all things, and others of none at all.

In other words, nature shows us that it shows itself in “apparition itself,” and the location of apparition itself is any body that “has in it” the ectypal patterns of the world. The brain of course is just such a “body,” and the mind imitates nature showing that it shows itself by providing the “most admirable” appearance of its own patterns, as apparition itself.

To put it slightly differently, the principle by which we know apparition itself is, as Hobbes says, sense:

So that if the *Appearances* be the Principles by which we know all other things, we must needs acknowledge *Sense* to be the Principle by which we know those Principles, & that all the knowledge we have is derived from it. And as for the causes of *Sense*, we cannot begin our search of them from any other *Phaenomenon* then that of *Sense* it self....

In this the mind seems to imitate nature, since it is by the self-reflexive capacity of sense to sense itself that patterns may be known in themselves, as patterns and not as the objects they reproduce, as nature showing itself that it shows itself. If we were now to ask, with Hobbes, about “the Subject of our Sense, namely that in which are the Phantasmes,” we would be led back to his materialism: as Hobbes writes in his objections to Descartes, “the thing that thinks is the subject to which mind, reason or intellect belong; and this subject may thus be something corporeal”:

I know I exist; the question is, what is the ‘I’ that I know?...It is quite certain that the knowledge of the proposition “I exist” depends on the proposition “I am thinking” as the author himself has explained to us. But how do we know the proposition “I am thinking”?...I do not infer that I am thinking by means of another thought....it seems that the correct inference is that the thinking thing is material rather than immaterial.¹⁰⁶

But it is not simply that the mind knows itself in the appearance of itself, as a disinterested and disembodied observer of its own self-image. Recall Hobbes’ declaration that his philosophy belongs to “voluptuous” men—to be embraced by the world is not a merely mental or ideal state of contemplation, but instead is one that engages the entire living body. As Hobbes puts it, the “subject of sense” is “the *Sentient* it self, some living Creature”:

And we speak more correctly, when we say that a *Living Creature* seeth, then when we say that the *Eye* seeth. The *Object* is the thing *Perceived*, and it is more accurately said, that we see the Sun, then we see the Light. For Light & Colour & Heat & Sound, and other qualities which are commonly called *Sensible*, are not *Objects*, but Phantasms in the Sense. For a Phantasm is the act of sense....¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, IV xxv 3.

Sensing is living; phantasm is life. Apparition itself cannot be observed, however: Light cannot be seen, nor sound heard, but light is seeing, sound is hearing, heat is feeling, they are all living. So again, by what principle does life know itself, as life, by what means does life live in itself? “Sentience” is Hobbes’ world for this self-reflexive sensory awareness, but the Sentient, child of the world, imitation of nature, possesses a single, crucial difference from nature. The Sentient can only sense that it *has* sensed, that it *has* lived, not that it *is living*:

For although someone may think that he *was* thinking (for this thought is simply an act of remembering), it is quite impossible for him to think that he *is* thinking, or to know that he is knowing. For then an infinite chain of questions would arise: “How do you know that you know that you know....”¹⁰⁸

In order for the Sentient to sense that it *is* sense, that it is nothing but phantasm, nothing other than apparition itself, it must have a past: and herein lies Hobbes’ peculiar materialism once again. The Sentient is “some living Creature”: a living creature moves, it is a body in motion, and motion rippling through the brain is imagined as time: “time is the mental image of motion.”¹⁰⁹ Sense takes notice of itself as something fading away, as a flight into the past:

But you will say, by what Sense shall we take notice of Sense? I answer, by Sense it self, namely by the Memory which for some time remains in us of things sensible, though they themselves pass away. For he that perceives that he hath perceived, *remembers*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁹ Hobbes, *De Mundo Examined*, p. 339.

¹¹⁰ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, IV xxv 1.

And so, if we were to seek ourselves, we could do no better than to begin in the past, not to reconstitute it as another present in the organ of imagination, but to ask what is the name of that which moves and moves us at the same time. In order for the history of any person to be true and complete, it would have to date back to the beginnings of all movement, starting at the farthest horizons, yet words become inadequate as we get closer to the frontiers of the inexpressible, we would have to wait for one impression to succeed another and to accumulate like generations, and finally we could begin to invent a voice for that which is silent. Nevertheless in all probability any such a name would not suffice, unless for that name we could derive another and then another, until there came a moment when there would be nothing left with which to name the primary source of the things named. Hobbes calls it the Sentient, but what is reflected in our brains is in the strictest sense invisible, mute, and will not answer to any name. We try to utter the final word only to realize that we have gone back to the beginning, we are once again floating in midocean, neither here nor there, but we have to start somewhere, the farthest horizon is the shortest path to the heart, but whether the phantom lights that shine in our heads are as good as life because they resemble life, will have to remain unanswered. At least now we are in the right mind to read *Leviathan*. The doors are now open to a unified understanding of Hobbes' thought whereby his metaphysics, his epistemology, and his political theory may be articulated within the same idiom—the idiom of phantasmic possession.

Mimesis and Political Thought in *Leviathan*

In this section, I explicate Hobbes' characterization of sovereign power as an artificial person by uncovering the source of Hobbes' notion of artificiality in the Platonic idea of *mimesis*. According to Hanna Pitkin, when Hobbes writes that sovereign power is an artificial person, what he means by "artificial" is an entity to which one has transferred one's natural rights.¹¹¹ But it becomes clear when we read Hobbesian artificiality in light of Platonic *mimesis* that artificiality amounts less to a juridical transfer of natural right from subject to representative than to what Hobbes calls a "perpetual embrace" in which each member loses its identity in the other. Artificiality, in other words, is more than a matter of giving up something one possesses: it is Hobbes' way of conceptualizing identification through self-loss. And Hobbes' true achievement lies in his account of mimetic deindividuation or self-loss as the foundation of the modern state.

Hobbes' theorization of self-loss begins with his *First Principles* and *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, and finishes in *Leviathan*. In the former, ratiocination, understanding and discourse are all said to arise out of the originary operations of the imagination, of "phantasmes" and "apparitions" which constitute not just the mind but human identity *tout court*. In *Leviathan*, Hobbesian political philosophy culminates in the assimilation of multiple human bodies to the singular, irresistible persona of the all-powerful sovereign. Far from supplanting the medieval belief that a sovereign's person mimetically embodies the collective with a contractual theory in which the state is

¹¹¹ Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, pp. 2-37.

conceived as the designated representative of the subjects' will, Hobbes' account of the phantasmic origins of sovereignty actually converges with the affective tradition from which it seems to depart.

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the *art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal.¹¹²

Most people live alongside beautiful nature without realizing just how voluptuously they are embraced by it, they do not fathom even half of it, and they nearly always deceive themselves about the half they know, mainly because they desire with all their might that this and other worlds should be made in their own image and likeness, not that it matters who or what created them. As Hobbes reminds us, although man imitates nature in creating a commonwealth, man is also an imitation of nature.

Hobbes' argument in *Leviathan* seems to repeat his earlier positions, in particular his materialist-mimetic conception of mental activity. Take for example this well-known passage:

Concerning the thoughts of man...they are every one a *representation* or *appearance*, of some quality, or other accident of a body without us; which is commonly called an *object*. Which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of a man's body; and by diversity of working, produceth diversity of appearances. The original of them all, is that which we call SENSE; (For there is no conception in a man's mind, which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense.)...the cause of sense, is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense, either immediately, as in the taste and touch; or mediately, as in seeing, hearing, and smelling; which pressure, by the mediation of nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain, and heart, causeth there a

¹¹² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 3.

resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart, to deliver itself.... (6)

We have all the usual suspects: thoughts are representations of objects that exist “without us”; sensory experience of all kinds amounts to the appearance of some “accident” in the organs of sense; the heart resists and “delivers it self” of the pressure caused by external objects acting on the sensory apparatus by moving the “Nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body”; this emancipatory “endeavour” by the heart is the direct cause of thought and all other inner activity. The stirrings of the heart and the motions of the organs of sense have their ultimate origins, however, in the external objects whose accidents thoughts in the mind *are*. And finally, Hobbes’ word for the sensory apparatus’ reproduction of the external world is still phantasmic—he calls it “fancy”:

Yet still the object is one thing, the image or fancy is another. So that sense in all cases, is nothing else but original fancy caused (as I have said) by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained. (7)

In his earlier philosophical works, Hobbes depicts the mind as a reflecting pool, forced by its very nature to mirror the foreign species that cross its path. According to this scheme, the sense organs are always fully eclipsed by the external objects and foreign species that are reflected in it; the mind never leaves this path of totality, the mirror is always full. In *Leviathan*, to this mirror-pond theory of the mind and sensation Hobbes introduces the concept of *order*. The question is this: Just as waves caused by a stone thrown into a pool of water gradually show the face of the person peering into its

depths, what gives wholeness to the image of the face of nature that the brain reproduces in the mind?

In the end, Hobbes does not explain with much certainty why our image of the world *does* follow any coherent or meaningful pattern. What order there is among the phantoms floating in our heads is simply a feeling of harmony or understanding caused by images gradually clustering and agglomerating to one another over time. Desire, a fixed idea, some goal to strive for, the determination to get from here to there, the imposition of a causal nexus over the manifold of sensory experience, none of these is primarily responsible for the coherency of our thoughts. None of these provides in the first place a coherent picture of the world because each one—desire, determination, the imposition of a causal nexus—is in itself a coherent picture of the world, the question is what gives desire, determination, the imposition of causality, what gives each one its own special power to order our experiences. In the end, the source of order is nothing more than repetition:

...in the imagining of any thing, there is no certainty what we shall imagine next; only this is certain, it shall be something that succeeded the same before, at one time or another...For the impression made by such things as we desire, or fear, is strong, and permanent, or (if it cease for a time,) of quick return: so strong it is sometimes, as to hinder and break our sleep. From desire, ariseth the thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that which we aim at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean; and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power. (12-13)

It is not Hobbes' point to say whether or not it is possible to obtain a coherent or meaningful picture of the world: he assumes that such a picture is possible, and he wants to say what it *means* to have a coherent picture in the mind. We do possess the power to

come up with the image of something we like and even the thought of how to attain it. But that is the case only because the object-causes of our desire have already taken possession of *us*. Expression is thus the negative or inverse of *impression*, the copy of a copy, as it were. Utterances, gestures, words of any kind, there is nothing we can express that does not repeat the impressions of object-causes of desire moving in our heads. These formal aspects of expression are derived from the relationship between the speaker and the world that possesses him. Every time a person speaks, a deeply intimate truth is revealed, and it is to this aspect of using words that Hobbes wishes to direct our attention, apart from what “we imagine of their nature”:

The general use of speech, is to transfer our mental discourse, into verbal; or the train of our thoughts, into a train of words.... (16)

For though the nature of that we conceive, be the same; yet the diversity of our reception of it, in respect of different constitutions of body, and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions. And therefore in reasoning, a man must take heed of words; which besides the signification of what we imagine of their nature, have a signification also of the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker; such as are the names of virtues, and vices.... (21-22)

Nosce teipsum, (4): For the sources of desire, the origins of all the heart’s endeavors, Hobbes proposes a most classical solution: look in yourself, the answers to your question lie within, there is nothing you desire that is not in some sense already within you, if you wish to understand your desires, examine yourself. A classical response, to be sure, though not without its own twists. Know thyself—*gnothi seauton*—was the great summons of ancient Greek mysticism. Hobbes keeps the sense alive but changes the technique. Better, he projects the ancient imperative through his theory of

phantasms. Know thyself—fine, what am I? Moreover, how should I recognize myself? Here is Hobbes' twist—know thyself by *reading* thyself, that is how he translates *nosce teipsum*, an inaccuracy he surely intended. Hobbes says: knowing is reading, understanding signs. Self knowledge thus requires reading the signs within; in Hobbes' case this means understanding the causes of all the thoughts and urges that I feel swimming inside me: they are phantasms of course, reproductions of the external world, through the looking glass we end up on the outside. Desire is, to repeat, the sign of possession, that is our natural state, a “perpetual embrace of a most beautiful world.”

Signs are always signs of possession: there are no phantasms that are not indicators of a foreign object dwelling in the brain, not the object itself of course, but its species, we almost said its *spores*, a foreign colony or outpost, as it were. And in this sense we are always yearning to return home. That is, desire amounts to the presence of a foreign species that has taken up residence in the brain, as a phantasm of that species' object. But as an endeavor, desire also represents the pull we feel towards the object behind the image we have of it—of course we do not “have” images; images have us.

“The POWER *of a man*, (to take it universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent good....” (50) We can now see that Hobbes' conception of human power is really *pandynamic*: that is, what from a one-sided personal perspective appears to be the means of obtaining *for oneself* the object of desire, is, when we consider what is really going on, the path *back* to the object-cause of desire. Power, in other words, is a two-way street: it is the power of a man to be moved, to be drawn towards the apparent Good, towards the hidden objects from which emanate the species that cause desire.

Power is everywhere, in motion all around us, its origins are experienced as if they belonged to ourselves because we always speak of “having” experiences in the same way that we “have” height, weight, skin, and so forth. Hobbes never tires of reminding us, though, that in “having” experiences, the world “has” us.

Still, “right here” is all that matters for most of us. And so power appears to be our means of obtaining for ourselves the objects of our own desire. Even as an appearance, power is real—that is, power is a body that moves. And thus power also is an object of desire. And what might the phantasm of power be? Of course, it is the thought of myself obtaining the object of desire. If power is an object of desire, it must appear to me as myself *being* powerful.

Or someone else. Or just the thought of someone else obtaining the objects of his or her desire. Or obtaining the objects of *my* desire. And that is the crux of the matter. Forget about whether or not anyone really is powerful, the point is only whether one has the *reputation* for being so: “Reputation of power, is power: because it draweth with it the adherence of those that need protection” (51) Herein lies the true meaning of power: it is both a real appearance and a hidden reality. It appears to be one’s means of obtaining some good, and in this sense it is a real appearance: “an imaginary face, truly, but a real ‘imagination’.” And as a hidden reality, power is the fundamental attribute of all bodies in that they are moveable; in this case they may be drawn towards the object-cause of desire.

My reputation for getting what I want draws others to me, and it is because of this word “adhaerance” that Hobbes says “reputation of power, is power.” And so must it

not also be the case that in drawing others to me, a problem arises? Why else should others adhere themselves to me if not that they would like to *become* me, to sit in my seat, to fill my shoes? In short, though I might be able to draw others to me, if I were attractive enough to do so, then I must be the object-cause of their desire. In their adherence I run the risk that they will get too close; the mirror should not think that *its own face* is the fairest of all....

On the other hand, I need you. In order for me to become the powerful person I imagine myself as, I need others to help me get what I want. In this sense my reputation for power does culminate in the means of obtaining some good. But, to refrain from taking too instrumental a view of it, the adherence of others to me and my plans also increases my value, or worth, which is, as Hobbes says, my “price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of [my] power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another” (51)

An interesting explanation for the employment of salaried workers thus arises: a contract of employment between boss and workers is not so much the exchange of labor for wages, as much as the exercise of power by the employer: nothing affirms my value or worth so much as paying you to work for me—this is even better than slavery, since in the wage system you willingly acknowledge my superiority; by accepting your paycheck, you register our comparative worth. It all comes down to this: he who commands the highest salary is worth the most.

This would all be banal in the extreme were it not for the philosophical justification that Hobbes gives to monetary basis of status. Of course, Hobbes does not

mean that defining human worth as “price” is wrong, or that we need to exchange a price-tag conception of status for the “true” value of human beings. On the contrary. Status, price, value, it all derives from a constitutive desire: the desire for power, power is the greatest object of desire because it opens the doors to all other objects. But the desire for power is also a desire to be something one is not, and it is insatiable. I am never powerful enough, I can always imagine myself getting more of what I want, good is never enough:

...the felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost aim,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest good,) as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he, whose senses and imaginations are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, that the object of man’s desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire. (57)

And so it is for everybody. Ever engrossed by this stupid struggle for honor, caught up in the rat race, lured by the promise of higher wages, we think we are amassing self-worth through greater buying power. One man is loathe to work for another, nothing humiliates like being handed a paycheck, another strives to become the world’s largest employer, on the surface everyone seems to get along, but in fact there is nothing but restlessness, envy and despair. If only we understood the most basic truth: power belongs to nobody, the objects we desire possess us, even the richest person cannot escape this elementary condition, perhaps he more than most. Let us be explicit on this point: by nature everybody wants to be all-powerful. It is the way things are for people endowed with a robust faculty of imagination, and we humans are nothing if not imaginative.

This is why Hobbes describes the natural state of man as a state of war. Our unending desire for power, which is to say, our feverish thirst for recognition, for ever greater reputation—and I say “our” because Hobbes holds this trait to be strictly evenly distributed among all people (75)—this unstoppable drive towards the object of desire, those phantasms that occupy our brains with self-images of omnipotence, driving us like slaves towards their object—will o’ the wisp that it is—all this, as Hobbes puts it with amusing restraint, “inclineth to contention, enmity, and war” (58). Let’s examine the Hobbesian causes of enmity in more detail.

“For *appetite* with an opinion of attaining, is called HOPE. The same, without such opinion, DESPAIR...constant *despair*, DIFFIDENCE of ourselves” (30). Let there be no mistake about Hobbes’ meaning here. Appetite simply registers the basic fact that we, like all bodies in the universe, are moved. Constantly. Appetite signifies the drive towards the object-cause of desire, it tells us that the phantasms dwelling in our brains are restless, they wish to go home, to the object that they represent, a return to or realization in the physical dimension. Hope, of course, registers the fantasy of just such a return—a return that is impossible, by the way, home appears as something external yet is none other than another motion in the brain. A motion caused by what. Easier to explain the cause of despair: the phantasm of someone else obtaining her goals; the thought that the other guy made it, that he achieved the impossible, the unification of thought and its object. Possibly a sneer or a sarcastic word. It takes so little to set us off, so fertile is our faculty of imagination, all that it requires is the smallest hint or suggestion of superiority in someone else and a tiny ferment attaches itself to the womb, a mental one in this case,

though the feelings are still visceral: no more can a man live whose desires are at an end, which is to say, who no longer feels despair (57).

This terrible and pathetic vulnerability of ours in matters relating to pride and humiliation lies at the heart of the violence we have always perpetrated against each other. It is the phantasms, the ghostly apparitions in our heads, yearning to get out, that are what propels us towards the cruelest behavior. What is competition but the *desire* for recognition of our power to attain our goals? What is diffidence if not the constant *imagination* that someone else is about to buy us out? What is glory, other than the *fantasy* of revenge, a fist smashed against the face in the mirror, that is, against the mocking face that others reflect back to us? Desire, imagination, fantasy: this is Hobbes' triptych of human suffering. In each term, we quite literally are not ourselves, not in our right mind, not at home where we are. As Hobbes says:

For every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself: And upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his contemners, by damage; and from others, by the example.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. first, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.

The first maketh men invade for gain; the second for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in the persons, or by reflexion in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.... (76)

To put it a little differently: in the state of nature, each person struggles for what Hobbes calls *kurios*, or authority: “For that which in speaking of goods and possessions, is called an *owner*, and in Latin *dominus*, in Greek *kurios*, speaking of actions is called author” (101). That Hobbes envisions the state of nature as a struggle for material possession is clear from his conclusion that competition causes men “to make themselves masters of other men’s persons, wives, children, and cattle.” But that he also thinks of the state of nature as a struggle for possession in the mimetic sense is clear from his association of possession with authority. In the sections of *Leviathan* where Hobbes defines “author” and “authority,” it is apparent that these are mimetic concepts. To begin with, Hobbes defines the notion of an author in terms of another notion, that of a person. As is well known, for Hobbes the word “person” signifies the face, which is a kind of mask, or “*disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man.” In other words, the person is a phenomenological entity, or, more to the point, a *theatrical* entity:

So that a person, is the same that an actor is, both on the stage and in common conversation; and to *personate*, is to *act*, or *represent* himself, or another; and he that acteth another, is said to bear his person, or act in his name....(101)

Furthermore, every person is a hypocrite: In Greek, *hupokrisis* refers to the playing of a part on the stage, the person, *persona*, *prosopon* being the mask worn by the actor. Personhood is by nature superficial, a matter of appearances, a disguise, as Hobbes says. But a disguise of what? *Hupokrinomai* means to represent dramatically, as well as to reply or answer: thus the actor’s part is to reply to the chorus; we might also say that the person is the part of us that answers or that answers to us when the question is uttered,

“who are you?” And so if we were to ask what it is that the person disguises, what is covered over in the verb *hypocrupto*, we might also put it this way: to what is it that the person answers? And the answer to that question depends on what sort of person you are.

There are two kinds of persons, according to Hobbes:

A PERSON, is he, whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of an other man, or of any other thing to whom they are attributed, whether Truly or by Fiction.

When they are considered as his own, then is he called a *natural person*: And when they are considered as representing the words and actions of an other, then is he a *feigned* or *artificial person*. (101)

If every person is an actor, every *persona* a disguise, the difference between a natural person and an artificial one comes down to whether or not the actor wears his own mask or the mask of another. In this Hobbes repeats Plato’s distinction between *mimesis* and *haple diegesis*, imitative and “simple” narrative:

[In simple narration], the poet is speaking in his own person; he never leads us to suppose that he is any one else...But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?...And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character he assumes...and in this case the narrative or the poet may be said to proceed by way of imitation. (393a5-c7)

The words and actions of a natural person are his own; those of an artificial person belong to another. We may draw a parallel between, on the one hand, Hobbes’ natural person and Plato’s philosopher, who always speaks in his own voice, and, on the other hand, the artificial person and Plato’s mimetic impersonator. And we can also see now how far from being a juridical concept is Hobbes’ term “representation.” In

Hobbes' usage, to represent means: to speak in the voice and act out the gestures of, another. This other, to continue along Hobbes' train of thought, is called an author: and here is the crux of Hobbes' theory of political authority. When Hobbes associates authority with possession, it is not enough to say he means that an authority possesses the right to do something.¹¹³ It is crucial, instead, to grasp what it *means* to possess "the Right of doing any Action" in a Hobbesian universe. Possessing the right to act or to speak means that one is a person, an actor, that one's voice and gestures are authorized by something else. Political authority does not mean the possession of rights—it is a state of possession.

Let us return to the claim that in the state of nature, all men are engaged in a struggle for authority. Certainly we can take "authority" in the sense of *to kurios*, the owner of goods or possessions. But it should be clear by now that much more is at stake in the struggle for possession. Each man in the state of nature struggles to become the *author* of his own actions, and the actions of every other man; to be the master to whom they answer. The cause of aggression is our insatiable thirst for power, but now we can see that such a thirst consists of the endeavor towards forcing others to recognize our goals as their own goals, our desires as their desires, our honor as the honor of all. To put it in terms of the Platonic concept of *tupos*: everybody wants to behold their own face on the coin of the realm. The war of man against man in the state of nature must be understood as a struggle for possession of the actions and words of all other men.

¹¹³ Cf. *Leviathan*, p. 102: "So that by authority, is always understood a right of doing any act...."

Suddenly it is rather evident what Hobbes has in mind when he describes Leviathan as a monster with “the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is enabled to conform the wills” of his subjects (109). This is nothing other than what everyone wants to be in the state of nature. And it is not simply that in nature men aim “to make themselves Masters of other men’s persons, wives, children, and cattle.” It is rather that in nature, let us recall, there is one almighty, constitutive desire: that “every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself.” In other words, in the state of nature, my value is determined by the price that others would pay for my assistance; the greatest humiliation lies in an offer of employment at a rate lower than the one I set for myself, and this is the cause of war:

And upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, [man] naturally endeavours, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have no common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his contemners, by damage; and from others, by the example. (75-76)

Those who determine the price of employment are said to be the most powerful, since only those who are too expensive to hire are able to set wages. So when Hobbes writes that the final power of sovereignty consists in establishing “Lawes of Honour, and a publique rate of the worth of such men as have deserved, or are able to deserve well of the Common-wealth,” he is describing a power that every man would literally die for. Nothing satisfies like universal accord over one’s own estimation of the value of things; unfortunately, “considering what values men are naturally apt to set upon themselves; what respect they look for from others; and how little they value other men,” nothing is

more unlikely to occur in the state of nature, “from whence continually arise amongst them, emulation, quarrels, factions, and at last war, to the destroying of one another, and diminution of their strength against a common enemy” (115).

In this sense, the Hobbesian state is simply the idea that each man would like to have of himself in nature—the realization of which idea is constantly frustrated by the unwillingness of others to accede to our own notions of value. The crucial point is that the power of the sovereign, and the sense in which sovereignty is representative, must not be understood in a solely juridical sense, in terms of the transfer of right from individuals in the state of nature to the abstract entity of the state. The power of the state, and the sense in which it is representative, relates rather to the sense in which people seek power over each other in the state of nature. And the state comes to fruition when it fulfills its mimetic purpose: when it is the voice to which all persons reply, when it moves its lips, the people speak:

But as men, for the attaining of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an artificial man, which we call a commonwealth; so also have they made artificial chains, called *civil laws*, which they themselves, by mutual covenants, have fastened at one end, to the lips of that man, or assembly, to whom they have given the sovereign power; and at the other end to their own ears. (138)

It is important to see the link between Hobbes’ conception of sovereignty and his earlier metaphysical positions regarding the nature of the self. If the figure of Leviathan describes what most of us would like to be in the state of nature, then Hobbes also conceptualizes obedience to the state in terms that are purely phantasmic or mimetic as well: we have no choice but to be moved or possessed, even in obedience. Hobbes’

theorization of obedience as the satisfaction of the desire to *be* how the state *appears* occurs through the concept of artificiality. In Hobbes' case artificiality is a mimetic concept in the Platonic sense; one can easily see how far off the mark is the idea (as with Pitkin and Foucault) that artificiality and representation are "juridical" concepts in Hobbes' thought. The state is an artificial being in the sense that it is created by man, and possesses the right to act on behalf of its subjects, but it is not the *transfer of right* that finally creates the state. It is in the sense of a mask, a false appearance, that that the Leviathan is an artificial person. And obedience may be said to be artificial in the same sense: in the sense of wearing a mask bearing the image of another person. This other is the ideal of prestige and peace embodied by the state. By achieving the status of artificiality, the circle of Hobbes' argument is closed, containing each one of us within the boundaries of his imaginary creation and ideal, the absolute state, or Leviathan.

Summary

In this chapter, I elucidated Hobbes' theory of political sovereignty by elaborating the affinities between notions of artifice and phantasm in his philosophy and Platonic concepts of self-loss and *mimesis*. One aim of this chapter has been to show that the experience of self-loss is integral even at the inception of modern liberal political thought. Even though the modern, liberal conception of the self is widely said to have its origins in the political thought of Hobbes, that conception of the self is actually much narrower than the version we actually find in Hobbes' writings. In resurrecting the lost concept of self-loss, this chapter not only broadens the narrow conception of the self

currently in favor with contemporary interpreters of Hobbes, but also seeks to enrich the idea of the self by liberal political theorists such as Isaiah Berlin.

I believe it is evident when we read Hobbesian artificiality in light of Platonic *mimesis* that Hobbes' conception of the representative state as an artificial entity is not in the end an attempt to imagine the state as a repository of natural rights transferred to it by individual, self-possessed subjects in the state of nature. In fact, if we place Hobbes' discussion of the covenant between individuals in the state of nature to transfer their rights to a sovereign representative in the context of his wider philosophical positions, that transfer appears much more like what he calls a "perpetual embrace" in which each participant in the covenant loses his or her identity in the other.

One result of placing Hobbes' political thought in the context of his ideas about cognition, matter and motion is that it becomes clear how much the life of the mind is for him the product of an originary assimilation to the surrounding world. What Hobbes achieves in *Leviathan* is a political apotheosis for his general philosophy, a climax in which the foundation of the sovereign state is derived from the assimilation of multiple human bodies to the singular, irresistible persona of an omnipotent, if imaginary, master. In the form of popular political sovereignty, then, the Hobbesian version of political legitimacy represents an experience of imitation, rapture and possession between subjects and the state.

This chapter thus develops the major theme of the dissertation in two ways. To begin with, my appropriation of Hobbes' philosophy of perception suggests that a strict delineation between spheres of experience and spheres of cognition is tenuous at best.

By weakening any strict differentiation between experience and cognition, I elucidate what it means to refer to political legitimacy as a condition of mind and body whereby the experience of power “makes sense.” Moreover, by problematizing the foundational status of self-interested individualism in Hobbesian political thought, my engagement with Hobbes begins to suggest alternatives to deriving the relationship between state, choice and power from the autonomy and consent of self-same political actors.

In the next two chapters, I return to the themes raised in the Introduction in order to bring Platonic and Hobbesian concepts of self-loss into a dialogue with more recent political theorists involved in debates about the relation between the self, artifice, political legitimacy and power. In the Introduction, I suggested that a truly liberal form of democracy would possess a greater affinity with the mimetic or phantasmic concept of the self elaborated in this dissertation than with Isaiah Berlin’s theorization of the self as a neutral space encased and stabilized within the protective rights implied by a negative concept of freedom. In a line of thought that both agrees with and goes beyond Berlin’s assertion that “conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self,” I have read Platonic and Hobbesian political philosophy in order to explicate the way in which political freedom is constituted through experiences of self-loss that are ultimately *productive*, not self-defeating. In other words, Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm both describe the formation of autonomous subjectivity through the very experiences of assimilation, imitation and seduction that Berlin would (wrongly) cast off to the margins of political life for being antithetical to the freedom of liberal subjects. Yet even Berlin suggests in a mimetic vein that the regulative ideals of liberal

individuality are inculcated as norms of behavior and guidelines for obedience into the psychic fabric of human beings. Consider, for example, his assertion that the protective rights defining the space within which one acts as a liberal individual ought to arise out of rules “so long and so widely accepted” that they have “entered into the very conception of what it means to be a normal human being.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, far from merely pertaining to Platonic philosophy or seventeenth century metaphysics, the idea of *mimesis* continues to be built into conceptions of the self in our own day.

Having already dealt with Isaiah Berlin in the Introduction, the first part of the next chapter traces the persistence of *mimesis* as a theme in Judith Butler’s reflections on the coevolution of power and identity in *The Psychic Life of Power*, and in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s critique of liberal individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. With these two works, self-loss manifests as a powerful device in twentieth century political thought, albeit in nearly opposite ways. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno understand liberal individualism as the product of *mimesis* in the cultural sphere, yet deny the legitimacy of liberal regimes for precisely that reason. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler works out the construction of individuality in mimetic terms, but also tries to identify sources of resistance to socialization within the logic of *mimesis* itself.

My comments on the thematization of self-loss by Horkheimer and Adorno and Butler prefigure one of the central concerns of the fifth and last chapter, which is to allay fears raised in the Introduction about the illiberal implications of a conception of political

¹¹⁴ Berlin, p. 165.

legitimacy derived from experiences of self-loss. To jump ahead a little bit, in the fifth chapter, my aim is to address such fears as they are expressed in the argument that technology gains an ever-widening influence over our lives at the expense of our autonomy as citizens. My ultimate purpose is to articulate the concept of legitimate self-loss in the context of technology, but instead of tackling contemporary political theories of technology head-on, I approach the problem through a kind of rear-guard action that takes a preliminary detour through a reinterpretation of ancient Greek conceptions of *mimesis*.

The strategy behind this return to ancient Greek sources is to move us forward, beyond the type of dead-end argument inspired by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that technology only functions to confine people within mass-produced clichés of consumer-identity. I find that the instrumentalist thesis breaks down by not pushing the dialectical analysis far enough. This is not to deny that technology is intrinsically bound up with the circulation of social norms of behavior. It is rather merely to suggest that our relations to technology also contain possibilities for the emergence of new selves. Butler's point, I think, is that the process of merging with social demands for normality cannot avoid producing unexpected "failures." In the necessary and constitutive failure of norms to take full purchase of any particular person, the "psychic life of power" bears a family resemblance to ancient Greek characterizations of cunning, assertive forms of self-effacement. In the sense of an unexpected reversal of self-effacement, *mimesis* sometimes goes by the name of *techne* in ancient Greek texts. To illustrate the connection between contemporary and ancient versions of assertive self-effacements, the

second half of the next chapter turns to Plato's *Ion*, as well as Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, and concludes with philosophical, fictional and historical depictions of *techne*, wily and assertive self-effacement.

CHAPTER FOUR

ASSERTIVE SELF-EFFACEMENTS, CONTEMPORARY AND ANCIENT

Introduction

In the last chapter, I presented Hobbes' notion of political artificiality in the wider context of his philosophy of nature as well as in the light of Platonic *mimesis*. The profit in such an interpretation, I claimed, is that we can thereby appreciate how very nuanced is Hobbes' understanding of the relation between selfhood and political power. Reading Hobbes against the grain of his commentators, I suggested that in its inception, the modern theory of the liberal state relies only partially on a hypothetical contract by means of which individual subjects are said to transfer their natural rights to the state. Beyond that, there is in Hobbes' theory of political representation a complex interrelationship between the force of an individual's self-interest and his or her assimilation to the collective image of popular sovereignty. One of the main goals of this fourth chapter is to show that the idea of *mimesis* and self-loss do not only speak to an esoteric interest in Platonic and Hobbesian philosophy, but continue to have a powerful role in the theorization of the self and power in the twentieth century.

The first part of this chapter includes some appreciative comments on Judith Butler's dialectical account of self-formation in *The Psychic Life of Power*. I read this text in response to problems I find in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of liberal individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

Horkheimer and Adorno interpret technology (to foreshadow the theme of the fifth chapter) as the specific medium for the mimetic production of liberal (they would call it “bourgeois”) individuality in capitalist societies. Yet they would deny the legitimacy of such an effect of technology because they understand technology only as an instrumentalizing force of imprisonment and stultification from which no release is possible. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler does not directly concern herself with technology, but she does construe the articulation of power and identity as a mimetic relationship. More to the point though, what sets her apart from Horkheimer and Adorno is that she tries to identify potential sources of resistance to socialization from within the logic of mimetic power itself, as the unanticipated appearance of self-assertion in the very process of mimetic self-effacement.

The attention I give to the theme of self-loss in the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno and Butler relates to another of the central concerns of the fifth and final chapter. In that chapter, I am going to address concerns that could be raised by liberal political theorists about the implications of a conception of political legitimacy derived from experiences of self-loss. I will do this by focussing on the loss of autonomy that is purported to result from the widespread influence in contemporary America of technology and technocrats in economic and political decision-making. But instead of plowing straight ahead into contemporary debates about the political implications of technology, I use the second part of this chapter to reinterpret ancient Greek conceptions of *mimesis* in light of the notion of assertive self-effacement that I glean from Butler’s work. This is not as convoluted a strategy as it may seem. My intent in returning to

ancient Greek texts is to counter the argument that the modern concept of technology is a purely instrumental one, and that its effects are purely destructive. What is missing from that perspective, which focuses exclusively on the disciplinary and alienating power of technology, is an imagination of how new selves might emerge from and by virtue of the instrumentalizing effects of technology.

Imagining our potential relationship to technology in terms of a dialectical movement between merging and emerging, I find a powerful resonance with ancient Greek representations of *mimesis* where self-assertion unexpectedly occurs in contexts where self-effacement seems to be the rule. It is precisely as assertive self-effacement that *mimesis* goes by the name of *techne* in the ancient Greek context, and we find characterizations of *techne* in Plato's Socrates and Ion, in Xenophon's Cyrus, and in Proteus, the eponymous trickster of ancient Greek mythology. In order to confront the question of technology from behind, chronologically speaking, I use the second half of this chapter to explore philosophical, historical and fictional depictions of *techne*—wily and assertive self-effacement—in Plato's *Ion*, as well as Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyrōpaedia*.

Horkheimer and Adorno: Dead-End Dialectics

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno interpret what we would today call “the media” as the specific site for the mimetic production of liberal, or bourgeois, forms of individuality in capitalist cultures. With a sentiment that is undeniably atavistic in a Platonic way, they assert that “culture now impresses the same

stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.”¹¹⁵ They deny the legitimacy of such a culture, and the political system that is associated with it, in an analysis that finds the “impressionization” of individuality to be a fate as final and unequivocal as a bureaucrat’s red-ink stamp.

The critique of liberal or bourgeois individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* arises out of an analysis that is technological in its focus: dialectical enlightenment describes the paradoxical effects of a human power over nature that takes the form of a *knowledge* that is distinctly *technological*: “[t]echnology is the essence of this knowledge....[w]hat men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men” (4). The dialectic revolves around the paradox that “men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power” (9). Let’s briefly trace the outlines of the argument.

First, enlightened knowledge is a form of power in the sense of a *science* that is not only the means by which humans gain an understanding of how things work, but more importantly, how to manipulate things or manufacture them (9). In this respect, enlightenment represents progress in an advance of human self-assertion, in humanity’s struggle to achieve comfort and health in the face of natural adversity. Second, through the very knowledge of nature that is the principle of advancing domination and control, enlightenment produces a reversal of its own aims. That is, enlightenment brings about a kind of loss of understanding about nature as well: “the nature of things, as a substratum

¹¹⁵ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p. 120.

of domination, is revealed as always the same” (9). For the “man of science,” technological knowledge represents nature as a unity of universally interchangeable objects: as an example, from a scientific perspective, an atom of uranium is not that different from a rabbit, since they are both formed out of the same fundamental matter (10). The specificity and dissimilarity of each is lost in the zeal for objectivity with which they are reduced to abstract quantities of matter, available for probing, manipulation and reproduction in the experimental laboratory (10). And where an atom is not an atom, and a rabbit is not a rabbit, because they have been reduced equally to abstract quantities of matter, the elements of nature are thereby rendered meaningless. Until the man of enlightenment is able to apprehend a thing within an abstract universalizing system and discovers some use to which to put it, he can see nothing: “the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows” (7). Enlightenment behaves towards things as a blind despot (9), it fails to recognize and apprehend whatever does not conform to the “rule of computation and utility” (6). In our “blind objectivity” (xvi) we, the inheritors of the Enlightenment and the self-imagined inheritors of nature, have become alienated from that over which we exercise our power.

Note, moreover, that the concept of the dialectic of enlightenment fuses the social and technological spheres: “[w]hat men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it *and other men*” (4, emphasis added). Scientific knowledge, presupposing the calculability of the world, also dominates “bourgeois justice and commodity exchange.” Quoting Francis Bacon, Horkheimer and Adorno ask, “is there

not a true coincidence between commutative and distributive justice, and arithmetical and geometrical proportion?" (7) In bourgeois societies, all people are equivalent; natural dissimilarities are made comparable by reducing everyone to abstract quantities that can appear equally as the bearers of civil rights or as statistics on research organization charts (123). In short, if the progress of enlightenment is to be understood technologically, as advances in "the calculation of effectiveness and of the techniques of production and distribution" (xvi), then technology must also be conceptualized so that it includes the techniques of production and distribution of human beings: what Horkheimer and Adorno call "the culture industry."

To repeat: technology is to be understood specifically as the area where social selves are produced in bourgeois culture. Thus the concept of the dialectic of enlightenment also serves as a critique of the notion, cherished in a narrow version of liberal political thought, of natural norms of individuality prior to social arrangements, discursive formations, political exigencies and economic rationality. Horkheimer and Adorno open their essay on culture in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with the following statement: "culture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part" (120). Individualism is "no more than the generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly that it is accepted as such" (154). From an early age humans are enclosed "in a system of churches, clubs, professional associations, and other such concerns, which constitute the most sensitive instrument of social control" (149). Where mass production is standardized, humans are reduced to being standardized consumers of standardized

commodities who “behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with [their] previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for [their] type” (123). We all wash our clothes with the same range of laundry detergents (Tide, Bold, or Cheer—or one of the “green” brands for “green” consumers); we smell like the same selection of underarm deodorants (Teen Spirit and Brut for the high-school crowd, Calvin Klein Obsession for college students, and so forth); we eat the same three types of mass-produced cheese offered by the dairy industry (cheddar, jack, and swiss—of course, adding mozzarella in Italian restaurants); and so on—to speak only of the American market. Each of these products represents an illusory choice, and reflects the pseudo-individuality of the consumer, an individuality that is technological because standardized mass production reduces everyone to standardized consumers, and illusory because particular choices are tolerated only as long as the individual is completely loyal to the alternatives presented to him or her in the supermarket (154). Unpasteurized goat cheese is considered exotic or vaguely threatening. People are received by society as individuals only because they “have ceased to be themselves and are... merely centers where the general tendencies meet” (155).

At first glance, these assertions appear to be directed against social conformity, against the mass production not only of things but of people as types of consumers too; against the obliteration of a noumenal self beyond the sphere of cultural control and against the denial of the real ego to the benefit of “pseudo-individuality” (154). At times the essay on culture does appear to argue that the production of standard forms of individuality takes place at the expense of another individuality that is in some way prior

to social production, that “every advance in individuation [through “technological and social differentiation or specialization”] took place at the expense of the individuality in whose name it occurred” (155, 120). In another passage, the authors allude to “needs which might resist control” having “already been suppressed by the control of individual consciousness” (120). This seems to imply that resistance to the culture industry is not possible precisely because “needs” that *could* be beyond cultural control have been suppressed—and perhaps such suppressed needs are merely lurking in some extracultural place, waiting for a chance to stir from their subterranean hibernation? And in an earlier essay, Horkheimer and Adorno refer obliquely to “the potentialities that are [ours] by birth,” which in bourgeois societies are then modeled on the “production of commodities that can be bought in the market” (12-13). The idea of “potentialities” that are prior to the workings of cultural domination because they are ours “by birth” also seems to suggest that the force of the argument depends on an appeal to an individuality that is beyond the control of the culture industry, and on a promise of resistance coming from outside the sphere of domination.

Ultimately, however, the concept of dialectical enlightenment is not about locating extracultural sources of resistance to enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno want to criticize the position that an expression of freedom or resistance to domination can be validated by virtue of its correspondence to some extracultural reality. As they put it, no one can escape from himself anymore. Enlightenment is totalitarian (6, 145). Whatever “real” interests an act of resistance to enlightened domination might appeal to, by virtue of the very fact that such an act will be justified with “arguments in the process

of opposition,” it will implicitly acknowledge the “principle of dissolvent rationality for which it reproaches the Enlightenment” (6). By the “principle of dissolvent rationality,” Horkheimer and Adorno mean that the “multitudinous affinities” between all things are suppressed by “the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning and the meaningless object” that acquires meaning only through manipulation and insertion into an organized system (10). In other words, it is self-defeating to oppose and thereby hope to dominate an enemy whose principle of control is to oppose to himself everything and everyone around him as an object of domination.

Again, what Horkheimer and Adorno help us to see is the technological production of selves in modern, capitalist, liberal societies:

Individuation has never really been achieved....The individual who supported society bore its disfiguring mark; seemingly free, he was actually the product of its economic and social apparatus....As it progressed, bourgeois society did also develop the individual. Against the will of its leaders, technology has changed human beings from children into persons. (155)

Technology makes persons in the image of the prevailing conditions of power: for instance, a network of telephone lines, radio waves, handsets and cell phones “allow subscribers to play the role of subject, and is liberal” (122). The radio, by contrast, is democratic: it “turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all the same.” (Think of millions of American families gathered around their radios during the 1930’s.) The trend today seems to be towards more “interactive” technology: programmable televisions, video games with multiple settings and variable outcomes, telephone networks that enable people to pretend that

they are in control of their tools at any time and any place. At some other time, however, the very distinction between humans and technology might fade away, imprinting an individuality on people that is neither democratic nor liberal, but something completely different. Whatever the particular articulation happens to be between technology and the conditions of power, the gist of the concept of dialectical enlightenment is precisely the impossibility of not being oneself, or of escaping from whom one is.

Such an escape is unfathomable because the act of resistance that might oppose enlightenment would itself be a product of enlightenment, of enlightened self-consciousness, an oxymoron if there ever was one. Enlightenment in the sphere of consciousness would mean that one recognizes that one has become the most “proficient apparatus”:

... in inflection on the telephone or in the most intimate situation, the choice of words in conversation, and the whole inner life as classified by the somewhat devalued depth psychology, bear witness to man’s attempt to make himself a proficient apparatus.... (167)

And self-awareness in this regard makes no difference: as Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, even though consumers see clearly the contrived nature of their intimate reactions to each other and the source of their desires in advertising, they will still speak in clichés to each other about the latest trends in politics, the stock market, fashion and sports on standardized mass-produced mobile telephones sold to them by market research divisions of international media conglomerates (167).

Even as humans are reduced to statistics on the charts of market research organizations, the scientific management of society depends on a warm, pleasurable

reaction to technology, on “demand,” not “simple obedience” (136). Thus people demand and consume the individual life-style, even when they see through it, because it is produced as a form of amusement: at the movies, in magazines and books, on television, in fact anywhere the ideals of “domesticated naturalism” can be displayed as objects of appetite and reverie (131, 144). In other terms, Horkheimer and Adorno see the essence of the entire culture industry in the entertainment business, and view the axiom of success in the entertainment industry as paradigmatic of “making one’s way” in society generally: “it is still possible to make one’s way in entertainment, if one is not too obstinate about one’s own concerns, and proves appropriately pliable” (132). What this “pliability” means is that whether on the telephone or at the movies, playing a video game or shopping for that distinctive baseball cap or penny loafers, everyone is absorbed into the world of technology—a world of tools, toys and tailors that is technological by virtue of the fact that production, distribution and demand are all completely administered.

With respect to this “pliability,” Horkheimer and Adorno allege that people are kept in a state of permanent attachment to mass-products (that in turn produce a sense of individuality and agency) through the constant references to sex in marketing and advertising campaigns. Sexual content maintains a steady demand for the images, gestures and words produced that define social categories and standards of conduct, while the censorship of explicit sex keeps consumers within the straight and narrow of acceptable behavior: “precisely because it must never take place, everything centers on copulation” (141). In this account of the technological-cultural production of

individuality as the effect of entrancement and glamour, there seems to be a suggestion once again of extracultural feelings and instincts subject to “the permanent denial imposed by civilization [and] inflicted on its victims” (141). Yet the denial of sexual urges is “permanent”; again, the aim of the argument is not to say that civilization or culture suppresses needs that are more real than any others because they correspond to some extracultural domain. Any reference to primordial or instinctual needs would have to be articulated from the perspective of a discursive logic, produced within the confines of some officially sanctioned form of expert knowledge, by legitimate members of a profession that is itself an instrument of social control.

If this all seems rather heavy-handed, that’s because it is. Horkheimer and Adorno represent the dialectical reversals of enlightenment in terms of achievements in science, technology and social management, and people are simply the by-product of such reversals. In other words, the dialectical reversal of enlightenment into alienation is something that *happens to* people, but people are not understood to be the agents of a dialectical reversal of their own alienation. The value of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is inestimable, and it lies precisely in exploding the fancy that the liberal conception of individuality as neutral space of negative freedom is not itself the product of assimilation to conditions of power and production that are prior to individuality. But the problem with the analysis I think has to do with the failure to theorize the production of selves in technology as the location of another dialectical reversal. I now want to spend some time commenting on Judith Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power*, because there she takes an additional step in the dialectic of productive self-loss, where the confinement of people

within mass-produced clichés of identity is followed by a moment of inadvertent self-assertion.

Judith Butler: The Dialectic of Self-Effacement and Self-Assertion

In a vein of thought that bears a cousin-like relationship to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (the common grandparent is surely Hegel), Judith Butler theorizes the self-same individual political subject as the effect of “a prior power,” but also tries to identify sources of resistance to socialization that are internal to the movement of power itself: a paradoxical movement that is mimetic in nature. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, for instance, she identifies autonomous individuality as the effect of a “miming”: taking the famed passages on lord and bondsman in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, she interprets the bondsman’s autonomy as an imitation of the body of the lord:

...only by miming and covering over the mimetic status of that labor can the bondsman appear to be both active and autonomous...if the bondsman effects autonomy through a miming of the lord’s body, a miming which remains hidden from the lord, then the “autonomy” of the slave is the credible effect of this dissimulation.¹¹⁶

Apart from *mimesis*, the other key idea here is that the bondsman’s miming of the lord’s body is *denied*: that is, neither the lord nor the bondsman can acknowledge the mimetic nature of the bondsman’s activities if the effect of his autonomy is to succeed: “You be my body for me,” says the lord to the bondsman, “but do not let me know that the body you are is my body” (35). This situation sets the stage for a struggle: when the bondsman produces an object, who owns it? On the one hand, the object belongs to the

¹¹⁶ Butler, p. 36-37.

bondsman in an immediate sense, since he made it. On the other hand, the bondsman's labor takes place in the service of the lord. Just because the bondsman made the object, that doesn't mean he owns it, any more than a toaster owns the slice of charred bread that pops out of it simply because it produced the heat that created such an effect. Whereas we don't have much trouble simply taking the toast away from the toaster, neither saying please nor thank you to it, things are different with the bondsman. As far as we know, the toaster has no consciousness of either making toast or of my taking the toast it makes. The bondsman is different. He understands. He understands that what he makes embodies his labor, and that what he makes is made under the compulsion to give it up (40). And probably unlike the toaster, the bondsman acquires a sense of who he is from these two contradictory facts, contradictory because in asserting himself through labor, he also makes himself available for a sacrifice, as when the lord takes the object that he has made. In a Marxian vein we might say that the more he makes, the more is taken from him: and "if these objects are relentlessly sacrificed, then he is a relentlessly self-sacrificing being... a persistent site of vanishing" (40).

At the moment the bondsman recognizes himself as "a persistent site of vanishing," as "a negating activity," and not only that, but as "subject to a full and final negation in death," he recoils in horror from his own abjection and "takes up a position of smugness or stubbornness, clinging to what appears to be firm about himself" (41). What follows are a series of attempts by the bondsman to disavow his shadowy existence, and in each case, what is supposed to bring about a sense of self-certitude turns out to be another instance of his insubstantiality. So, for instance, the bondsman turns to "the

sphere of the ethical” as a defense against the tenuousness of his own existence, subordinating himself to norms that give him “an ethical shape” (43). Seeking to come into relation with an absolute law, the bondsman (who Butler now calls “the subject” or “the self”) ends up denying his own perishable body in the service of a pure thought of “the unchangeable” (47). Yet, to echo Horkheimer and Adorno, the subject can never stop being himself: even his devotion to permanent ideals of justice “remains a self-feeling, a feeling of the body compelled to signify the transcendent and unchangeable” (47). In other words, though the bondsman never stops discovering new ways of renouncing his abject existence, each performance of renunciation “becomes the occasion for a grand and endless action that effectively augments and individuates the self it seeks to deny” (49). Exerting himself through efforts at self-denial that are in turn stoic, Kantian and Christian, every attempt by the bondsman to disavow whatever pertains to his phenomenal body inadvertently culminates “in the *production* of self-consciousness as a pleasure-seeking and self-aggrandizing agent” (53).

What is dialectical about this, of course, is the paradox that the bondsman asserts himself through an act of self-sacrifice. Every effort to suppress the body, to disavow its pleasures, to negate its impulses and experiences, and to deny its ineluctable trajectory towards death and nothingness, is in itself an expression that preserves and even asserts the body precisely by virtue of self-negation or suppression. Self-denial is paradoxically the means of bodily expression.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Cf. Butler, pp. 49, 53, 57, 58.

Butler theorizes the dialectic of self-effacement and self-expression through a meditation on the social construction of identity that zigzags between works by Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. Her starting point is the Foucaultian analysis of imprisonment as a paradigm of socialization and normalization: “the prisoner’s individuality is rendered coherent by being made into the discursive and conceptual possession of the prison” (85). Butler reads Foucault as a disciple of Horkheimer and Adorno, for whom society can also be imagined as a prison, and individuals as the product of a normative ideal of individuality “inculcated” into the psychic identity of the prisoners (that is, us). Recall this passage from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previously determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type.”¹¹⁸ The psyche thus possessed by the discursive and conceptual ideals of the prison becomes the “soul” of the prisoner, his or her self. And the soul, bearing the imprint of social norms, in turn “forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being.”¹¹⁹

What Butler appreciates in Foucault’s interpretation of identity-formation is the boldness with which he locates both body and psyche within the field of social forces: there is no self prior to the exercise of power in processes of normalization and individuation, “no body outside of power” (91). At the same time, however, Butler rejects the notion that the substratum of the self is nothing more than a “malleable surface for the unilateral effects of disciplinary power” (87). She turns to Lacan for a more

¹¹⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 123.

¹¹⁹ Butler, p. 91.

nuanced psychology of socialization and normalization, and for a dialectical theory of resistance to becoming intelligible and “the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity” (86). In Foucault, the psyche is understood to receive unilaterally the effect of social demands for “inhabiting a coherent identity.” Butler reads Lacan to say that the psyche consists of *both* a norm “that installs the subject within language and hence within available schemes of cultural intelligibility,” as well as an unconscious that resists becoming intelligible and regular (86).

More to the point, Butler appreciates the Lacanian point of view for treating resistance to regularization as an effect taking place *within* the very logic of the dialectic of self-effacement and self-assertion. In what may be an allusion to Horkheimer and Adorno’s bleak observation that “the need which might resist control has already been suppressed by the control of individual consciousness,” Butler asks whether we can “reformulate psychic resistance *in terms of the social* without that reformulation becoming a domestication or normalization?” (102) With Lacan, Butler tries to account for resistance *as an internal consequence* of the production of socially coherent identity, not as a resistance *to* the production of identity, “outside the law or in another register or as that which escapes the constitutive power of the law” (97). Citing with approval Foucault’s assertion that “by definition, [resistances] can only exist in the strategic field of power relations,” Butler uses Lacan to take an additional step:

The disciplinary apparatus produces a subject, but as a consequence of that production, it brings into discourse the conditions for subverting that apparatus itself. (100)

In an attempt to cast some light onto the idea that resistance appears as the self-subversion of power, I'd briefly like to recall Butler's interpretation of Hegel. There, she writes that as far as the bondsman (who stands for "the subject," or "the self") is concerned, every effort to suppress the body, to disavow its pleasures, to negate and deny its impulses and experiences, is in itself a movement that preserves and even asserts the body precisely by virtue of its attachment to self-negation or suppression, and that these are paradoxically the instruments of the body's expression. Subject-formation thus comes about at the expense of the body. But Butler demands that there also be "some bodily remainder" (91), and so it is in the subordination and regulation of the *body* that she locates resistance to demands for inhabiting a socially coherent identity. On the one hand, the bondsman's subordinated body positively produces a normal social being; his body "is a destruction on the occasion of which a subject is formed" (92). On the other hand, the impulses or bodily experiences that would be repressed are inadvertently preserved by the very activity of regulation, because repression generates the very pleasures and desires it seeks to regulate (58). For example, "sexologists who would classify and pathologize homosexuality inadvertently provide the conditions for a proliferation and mobilization of homosexual cultures" (59).

I also want to return to the observation that in Butler's account of the dialectic, persistent and productive self-erasure is *mimetic* in character. There are two explicit references to *mimesis* in her reading of Hegel. The first, which I have already pointed out, is when she writes that "the bondsman effects autonomy through a miming of the lord's body." The second takes place when she comments on the bondsman's turn to "the

sphere of the ethical” as a way of displacing the tenuousness of his own existence with something more certain and enduring. With an absolute law in mind, the bondsman imposes order upon his behavior by acting as a witness and judge to his actions:

“Witnessing implies a mimetic reduplication of the self, and its ‘dispassion’ is belied by the passion of mimeticism” (45). In other words, though the “emerging subject” seems to be suppressing the shadowy and unpredictable nature of his body by adopting a unchanging ethical rule to live by, this “dispassionate” attitude towards his body turns out to be illusory. It is illusory because he *feels* his devotion to the domain of unchangeable rules in himself, his devotion is an *attachment* to the transcendent, it is thus a “passion” for miming the ideal ethical subject.

In each of these instances, the subject of *mimesis* goes through a moment of unexpected productivity while pursuing a course of action that is intended to be self-negating. The bondsman sacrifices himself by miming the lord’s body with his own labor, and by giving up what he makes to the lord, yet achieves a sense of himself precisely through these self-negating activities. The bondsman also denies himself by miming the ideal self of the ethical sphere, yet actually affirms himself through a passionate attachment to the ideal. In each case, *mimesis* denotes an instance of productive self-effacement.

Horkheimer and Adorno help us to see technology—understood as a kind of knowledge of nature—as an instrument of social control, but they leave their dialectical analysis with the annihilation of the self in the face of a totalitarian culture industry that reproduces individuality on a mass scale. Butler bravely tries to push the dialectic

through the site of the self's obliteration, to the point when self-effacement produces an unanticipated moment of self-assertion. It is through a reinterpretation of *mimesis* as productive self-effacement that I suggest a new way of thinking about our relationship to technology in the next chapter. Before I get to that, I will first elaborate upon what I mean by assertive self-effacement through a discussion of the ancient Greek concept of *techne*.

The Ancient Ruse of Self-Effacement

What is *techne*? Consider the following passage taken from Plato's *Phaedrus*:

[T]hey will first describe the soul with perfect accuracy...secondly they will say what its action is and toward what it is directed...thirdly they will classify the speeches and the souls and will adapt each to the other, showing the causes of the effects produced and why one kind of soul is necessarily persuaded by certain classes of speeches, and another is not...until they write and speak by this method (*tropon*) we cannot believe that they write by the rules of art (*techne*).¹²⁰

According to the Platonic humanist Werner Jaeger, *techne* has the sense "which we associate with *technique* or *profession*." In *politike techne*, "the political *techne*," the practical element is making good citizens, which Jaeger defines as enabling people to acquire knowledge of the greatest goods in human life and of the Idea of good itself.¹²¹

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates explains to Polus and Gorgias that the political art (*technas...politiken*) and the "bodily" arts (*techna...somati*)—"justice and legislation, medicine and gymnastic"—"always attend to what is best (*to beltiston therapeuouson*)

¹²⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus* 271a6-c6.

for the body and the soul.”¹²² In this section, however, I will not elucidate the Platonic concept of *techne* by drawing attention to what Plato says *techne* is, but rather to what he says *techne* is not. This does not mean that *techne* and the concept of method will thus be left over as a kind of positive image or residue. Instead of trying to get a handle on what Plato means by *techne* through what he says it is, I will pay attention to what Plato *does* in denying that rhetoric and rhapsody are not *technai*.

Plato writes in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric does not achieve the status of a *techne*, and as the quotation from *Phaedrus* suggests, this is because rhetoric is not methodical. Instead, rhetoric is only a knack (*empeirian*) for producing charm and “gratification” (*apergasias*), the mere “semblance” (*eidolon*) of justice, in a person (465a4, 462c). Far from making good citizens, rhetors are of no benefit to anyone, since they “insinuate” (*hupodusa*) themselves into their publics by means of “fawning” (*kolakeutike*) and “flattery” (*kolakeian*, 464c6-e2). When Socrates says that rhetoric is “not a *techne* but a routinized knack” (*ouk esti techne, all’ empeiria kai tribe*), Plato uses the word *tribe* not only to signify “routine” but also to invoke its other meaning, “rubbing” or “wearing down.” Where rhetoric fails to achieve the status of a method, it does more harm than good because it “rubs” its nature as conjecture (*stochasamene*) into those who are subject to it (464c, 465a2, 487a3). Conjecture literally means a throwing together: and we appear to be approaching the ectypal domain. Recall that Plato’s conception of the

¹²¹ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia II*, trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 96, 113, 157.

¹²² Plato, *Gorgias*, 464b4-c5.

human being as an ectype hinges on the term *ensemenasthai*: “an impression is taken.” In the context of speech, what is conveyed by the term *ensemenasthai* is that information is conducted from one speaker to another, as in the use of a stamp, mark, or seal. Children grow up into just adults when they are stamped into the image of justice. In the *Republic*, concern for the well-being of the young has everything to do with *tribe* and *plassein*: with massaging and wearing down the bodies and minds of the young and making them into very nearly the form of an unchanging god.

Rhetoric also makes an impression, that is, in the act of speaking, rhetors “stamp” or “wear” an image of themselves into their auditors. But in the *Gorgias*, the point is that *tribe* is of no benefit to anyone. Speaking by means of a “well-worn knack” (*empeiria*), not *techne*, rhetors insinuate (*hupodusa*) themselves into a kind of sensuous immediacy with their audiences. Though the rhetor’s auditors feel pleasure and gratification, it is through such a reaction that they pass into a state of possession by a rhetor who is a phantom or idol: *eidolon*, “the appearance of justice” (463c-d). With this term *eidolon* Plato performs an ectypal transformation on the rhetor, reducing him to a ghost and an idol, what Hobbes calls fancy: an image existing in the mind, considered as being the thing itself.¹²³ Thinking we hear him speak, we call the rhetor Callicles, but in truth he is only a phantom, possessed by his audience and merely pretending to be himself.

Through its recollection of Hobbes’ view that every perception, what he calls “similitude” or “phantasm,” exists in the mind of the percipient as a reproduction of the world that is perceived in the perceiving body, the word *eidolon* tells us that Plato is not

making a merely epistemological and methodological claim about rhetoric. His is an ethical point about the constitutive effect that rhetoric has over and through its participants. Plato invokes an entire range of feelings, desires, perceptions, thoughts and states of mind held by both rhetor and auditor as if they constituted a single body of water, single but not singular: an interplay of reflection, multiform, ever-changing. Elsewhere, Plato uses *eidolon* to describe images reflected in water,¹²⁴ a usage not unappreciated by Hobbes, but whereas the Hobbesian *eidolon* is a copy of nature and the basis of all mental activity, in error and truth, Plato appears to form a “voluptuous” or sensuously intimate conception of rhetoric in order to denigrate conjecture to the benefit of *techne*.

Conjecture (*stochasamene*) is presented not just as a way of thinking, but as a “strange” and “great power.”¹²⁵ Likewise, there is “something supernatural” (*daimonia*) about rhetoric because it is more than a way of speaking. Conjecture and rhetoric both represent the way two or more people become what they are by means of being thrown together in mutual insinuation and gratification (456a, 462c).

As Socrates says to Callicles:

Now I always observe that, for all your cleverness, you are unable to contradict your favorite, however much he may say or whatever may be his account of anything, but are ever changing over from side to side. In the Assembly, if the Athenian Demos disagrees with some statement you are making, you change over and say what it desires.... (481e)

¹²³ Hobbes, *De Mundo Examined*, p. 52.

¹²⁴ Plato, *Sophist*, 266b; *Phaedo*, 66c.

¹²⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 456c.

A flatterer moves and shifts in order to please and thereby keep the favor of his or her audience: Terence Irwin wants us to understand this as a statement of the slavish nature of flatterer, who “performs all kinds of services for his client which are humiliating for a free man, for anyone other than a slave, and which are incompatible with the flatterer’s self-respect.” The protean behavior of the flatterer “will be intolerable to anyone who cares about his own self-respect and about acting on his own values rather than adapting himself to other people’s.”¹²⁶ For his own part, Socrates also purports to prefer public hostility to such “internal discord and contradiction” (*hena onta eme emato asumphonon einai kai enantia legein*, 482b). But this inner simplicity is deceptive:

[Philosophy] speaks what you hear me saying now, and she is far less fickle to me than any other favorite...philosophy always holds the same, and it is her speech that now surprises you, and she spoke it in your own presence. (482a-b)

Thinking we hear him speak, we call it Socrates, but in truth Socrates is only a phantom, possessed by Philosophy, pretending to be Socrates. The putative difference is that Socrates achieves self-sameness by means of philosophical impersonation, while Calicles is possessed by a multitude of personalities.

The import of the difference between singular and pluralized notions of the person was not lost on the authors of the Federalist Papers, who warned us, nearly 2000 years later, “not to be enamored of plurality in the executive.” That this is not just a matter of the institutional character of government, but really is a question of the character of

¹²⁶ Plato, trans. Terence Irwin, *Gorgias* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1979), p. 131.

political citizenship, is evident in the reason given, that when political actors are of more than one person, it “tends to conceal faults and destroy responsibility”:

It often becomes impossible...to determine on whom the blame or the punishment of a pernicious measure, or series of pernicious measures, ought really to fall. It is shifted from one to another with so much dexterity, and under such plausible appearances, that the public opinion is left in suspense about the real author.¹²⁷

In other words, political responsibility, to be punishable for one’s actions, depends less strictly on the manifestation of wrong doing than on the underlying provenance of one’s authority. This concept of political responsibility can be traced to Plato, who in the *Gorgias* calls the behavior of rhetoricians *daimonia*, which, as “heaven-sent,” gives evidence of Socrates’ sarcasm, but which, as “marvelous,” indicates the more straightforward observation that rhetors cast their auditors under a spell, and that rhetors assimilate themselves, spell-bound, to the audience they seek to engage. Again, the point is more political and ethical than epistemological. Like a pickpocket slipping into a mass of shoppers on a busy street, the rhetor eludes responsibility: insinuating himself into his audience, he is not, according to the criticism, the author of his own actions.

In the early dialogue *Ion*, Plato has Socrates wondering whether or not the rhapsode Ion is the author of his own actions and thus the practitioner of *techne* when he performs Homeric epic. Ion has the peculiar problem of going into a daze or falling asleep when anyone speaks of any other poet. Whenever Homer’s name is mentioned,

¹²⁷ Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*, p. 428.

however, "I wake up at once and am all attention and have plenty to say."¹²⁸ The answer, Socrates claims, is obvious:

No one can fail to see that you speak of Homer without any art (*techne*) or knowledge (*episteme*). If you were able to speak of him by rules of art, you would have been able to speak of all other poets; for poetry is a whole. (532c5-10)

Socrates certainly does not mean to suggest that Ion is inept for lack of methodical knowledge of poetry in its entirety. On the contrary, this rhapsode has the greatest success at the Homeric festivals: the dialogue opens with Socrates meeting Ion on his way back from the festival of Aesclepius at Epidaurus, where Ion royally boasts that "we obtained the first prize of all" (530a10). Indeed, despite Ion's lack of *techne*, his recitations of Homer have a powerful effect upon the audiences which attend the festivals where he performs. By his own account, Ion is able to get his spectators "to look awestruck at me, weeping and amazed" (535e2-4). Socrates' point, however, is that Ion's power of "speaking well" is not his own. Like rhetoric, rhapsody is something supernatural, a "divine power" (*theia dunamis*) which moves him, holding Ion entranced like a magnet: "this is not an art (*techne*) in you, whereby you speak well about Homer, but a divine power, which moves in you as in that stone which Euripides calls a magnet...." (533d2-d5):

For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires

¹²⁸ Plato, *Ion*, 532b10-c4. I am indebted to Professor Borch-Jacobsen's lectures on Plato for my interpretation of Plato's *Ion*.

men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain. For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art (*technes*), but as inspired (*entheoi*) and possessed (*katechomenoi*).... (533d5-e9)

In other words, thinking we hear him speak, we call the rhapsode Ion, but in truth he is only a link in a great chain, a chain that links him to his gods on the one side, on the other to us, his audience. Or so Socrates tells him. The crucial element in the dialogue is the rhapsode's answer when Socrates asks if Ion thinks what he has said is true, that poems "are divine and the work of gods, that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods," and that God himself speaks and addresses us through rhapsodes, who are the "interpreters of the interpreters" (*hermeneon hermenes*, 534e3-4, 534d3-4):

Ion: Yes, upon my word, I do: for you somehow touch my soul (*haptēi gar pos mou tois logois tes psuches*) with your words, Socrates, and I believe it is by divine dispensation that good poets interpret to us these utterances of the gods.

Socrates: And you rhapsodes, for your part, interpret the utterances of the poets?

Ion: Again your words are true. (535a2-10)

Ion beams with pride and gratitude to Socrates for "proving" (*tekmerion*) that he is divinely inspired. This word *tekmerion*, the proof of a demonstration, belongs to a word-group containing *tekmar* and *tekmaïromai*. *Tekmar* is the word for a fixed goal, such as the proof at the end of an argument, but also for the goal of any difficult journey, or a race; *tekmaïromai* means to make one's way by conjecture. We are once again on stochastic ground, and not just through word-play: Socrates wins Ion's assent through

nothing less than an act of conjecture, with the “proof” of Ion’s divinity, which is not so much a proof as way of insinuating himself into Ion by “touching his soul” with flattery.

Once Socrates’ speech seduces Ion into seeing that he is divinely inspired, Socrates can go on to compare Ion’s performance to Corybantic revelers and Bacchic maidens, who dance and “draw honey and milk from the rivers” when they are possessed (*katechomenoi*) “but not when they are in their right minds” (*ouk emphrones*, 533a5-6, 536c3). Perhaps realizing that he has been caught in the trap of his own vanity, and now struggling to save face, Ion denies that “that I praise Homer only when I am possessed (*katechomenos*) and mad (*mainomenos*), and I am sure you would never think this to be the case if you could hear me speak of him” (536d6-8). Yet Plato does not have Ion make the point frivolously. What Ion means is that he has “to pay the closest attention” (*sphodr’ autois ton noun prosechein*) to his audience:

Since, if I set them crying, I shall laugh myself because of the money I take, but if they laugh, I myself shall cry because of the money I lose.
(535e5-7)

On the one hand, Socrates is not wrong to call Ion possessed—*katachomenoi*—or inspired—*entheoi*—because, in the language of political representation, Ion is by his own account an actor whose performance is shaped by the desires of his audience. On the other hand, this is precisely why Ion is unable to lose control over himself when he performs Homeric epic: he is obliged to give them value for their time and money. Ion purposefully alters his routine according to the response of the audience because he literally cannot afford to lose possession of himself. He thereby keeps his subjects in a state of rapture while denying that he is equally lost in the scene of entrancement. Crab-

like, Ion keeps one eye trained on his audience and the other on the gods: each view calls for a supple openness to any direction he may be called upon to take. This enables Ion to deceive his audience with an apparently straightforward recital of Homer that is really a recital of their desires in Homeric language.

Socrates tries again to bring Ion around to the view that he is not in his right mind when he performs by asking if what Ion knows as a rhapsode is the same as what the various characters about whom Ion speaks know. For instance, Socrates asks whether a charioteer would be the best judge of whether Homer speaks correctly or not about “what Nestor says to his son Antilochus, advising him to be careful about the turning-post in the horse-race in honor of Patroclus” (537a5-7). This example is extremely telling. It concerns an episode in Book XXIII of the *Iliad*, when Nestor advises his son Antilochus how to win a horse race against Menelaus, when his own horses are not very fast and his rival’s are better equipped. Antilochus is also younger and less experienced than Menelaus: how can the weaker beat the stronger? Nestor’s advise is to reverse the seeming disadvantage by means of a trick: at a point in the track which narrows because it has been washed away by storm rains, Antilochus is to swerve suddenly across the path of Menelaus, forcing his rival to avoid a crash by reining in his horses. This maneuver enables Antilochus to beat Menelaus to the finish line.¹²⁹

According to Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, this episode is the most suited text of Homer to reveal the nature of conjecture, an agility of mind and body

enabling the reversal of disadvantage and victory to the party whose defeat had appeared inevitable, as well as the political flair “of arriving at the most correct idea concerning the future...foreseeing, as far as possible, the hidden advantages and disadvantages in what cannot be seen” (17-18). Also known as *metis*, or “cunning intelligence,” conjecture is a power of deceit:

It operates through disguise. In order to dupe its victim it assumes a form which masks, instead of revealing, its true being. In *metis* appearance and reality no longer correspond to one another but stand in contrast, producing an effect of illusion, *apate*, which beguiles the adversary into error and leaves him as bemused by his defeat as by the spells of a magician. (21)

It is Ion’s goal at the theater to lure his audience into believing that he is a charioteer, a general, a woman, and a god. It is Socrates’ aim to lure Ion into the admission that what he knows is not the same as what his characters know, and that when he speaks in their voices, it is without knowledge but only “by a divine dispensation.” At first, Ion acknowledges that the charioteer would indeed be the best interpreter of Homer’s words about Nestor and Antilochus, but even Socrates knows that this is not entirely true. As an illustration of conjecture, the passage from Homer would be perfectly suited to the expertise of a rhapsode, who also depends on the agility of mind and body characterized in conjecture to keep his audience in the palm of his hand: *katechomenos*, “to hold fast.”

¹²⁹ For a full discussion of this passage in the context of deceit and cunning, see Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Janet Lloyd, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, (Atlantic Highlands: The Humanities Press, 1978), pp. 12-26.

Later Ion changes his mind and insists that his art and knowledge encompass all the rest: “to me there appears to be no difference between them... anyone who is a good rhapsode is also a good general.”¹³⁰ Exasperated, Socrates blames Ion for avoiding the truth, for being “an absolute (*atechnos*) Proteus, twisting about this way and that, until at last you elude my grasp in the guise of a general, so as to avoid displaying your Homeric wisdom (*sophian*)” (541e8-542a1):

But in fact, Ion, if it is true what you say, that it is by art (*techne*) and knowledge (*episteme*) that you are able to praise Homer, you do me wrong (*adikeis*): you profess to know many fine things about Homer, and you promise to display them to me; but you deceive (*exapatas*) me, and far from displaying your knowledge, you won't even tell me what its nature is.... (541e1-6)

When Socrates calls Ion “a perfect Proteus,” Plato uses the term *atechnos*, which means not just “absolute,” but also “simply” and “unskilled.” On both counts, it hardly seems fitting: Proteus is not “simple,” since his is the original and eponymous power of polymorphism. It is also odd to see him described as “unskilled,” because according to tradition it is precisely the *techne* of Proteus to change his shape: In the *Odyssey*, Menelaus and three of his men disguise themselves in seal skins and lie waiting on the shore of the island Pharos until they are joined by hundreds of seals. Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea, then appears and goes to sleep among the seals. At that point Menelaus and his party seize him, and though the Old Man turns successively into many different shapes, they hold him fast and force him to tell them what god prevents them from leaving the island:

¹³⁰ Plato, *Ion*, 540e12, 541a11-b1.

We rushed upon him with a shout, and threw our arms about him, nor did that old man forget his crafty wiles (*techmes*). First he turned into a bearded lion, and then into a serpent, and a leopard, and a huge boar; then he turned into a flowing water, and into a tree, high and leafy...¹³¹

Proteus possesses the power to assume all kinds of different forms, and to conquer him, it is necessary to take him by surprise with an equally beguiling power.¹³² In order to seize upon his shimmering metamorphoses, one must become even more adaptable than he: out-shift the shifter, connive with a constantly changing situation, take part in it and adopt its nature for oneself.

Paradoxically, Plato demonstrates the greatest facility in the power of both simplicity and polymorphism when Socrates says that Proteus is *atechnos*: simple or unskilled. Socrates represents the epitome of simplicity and straightforwardness. He is the master of face to face, or voice to voice, combat. Yet straightforwardness is the least transparent of approaches; not because it is in fact the most opaque, but precisely because it appears to be the least. Simplicity is a seduction:

[T]he true lover of knowledge is always striving after being—that is his nature; he will not rest in the multiplicity of individuals which is an appearance only, but will go on—the keen edge will not be blunted, nor the force of his desire abate until he have attained the knowledge of the true nature of every essence by a sympathetic and kindred power in the soul, and by that power drawing near and mingling and becoming incorporate with very being, having begotten mind and truth, he will have knowledge and will live and grow truly, and then, and not till then, will he cease from his travail.¹³³

¹³¹ Homer, *Odyssey*, 4.454-458.

¹³² Detienne and Vernant, p. 20.

¹³³ Plato, *Republic*, 490a6-b7.

To define *techne* in opposition to shape-shifting, polymorphism, and seduction is itself worthy of respect simply for its massive deceptiveness and cunning. This is not a criticism of Plato. It is actually a lesson in the real meaning of *techne*. Victory over a shifting reality whose continuous metamorphoses make it almost impossible to grasp can only be won through an even greater degree of mobility, an even greater power of transformation. By conniving with a protean reality, one can ensure victory, whatever the circumstances and whatever the conditions of conflict.

In order to grasp *techne* as a political concept, let's return to the concept of conjecture (*stochazomai*). On its own, the word *stochazomai* means "to aim." Leaving the Platonic context for a moment, we find a series of ideas in general ancient Greek usage revolving around and adding flesh to the concept of aiming, in particular "interpreting" and "contriving." Interpretation and contriving, in turn, belong to the sphere of endeavor, of feeling one's way towards a destination: such as aiming towards command, *hegemoneuo*, a synonym of *stochazomai* literally meaning to lead the way, but which, as the root of "hegemon," also means to command or to rule. In Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, for instance, where learning "to aim well" is crucial for anyone who wishes to "command respect from others," aiming is not only a matter of using a bow and arrow, but of making strides towards the goal of commanding respect: "governing other people so that they might have all the necessities of life in abundance and might all become what they ought to be."¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1.6.7-8.

The straight line towards a goal may not always appear that way to one's adversaries, though. Whether over animals or humans, in order to command, it is necessary that one be "designing and cunning, wily and deceitful, a thief and a robber, overreaching the enemy at every point," though to friends such a person would be "the most righteous and law-abiding man in the world" (1.6.27-28). The stochastic art involves the ability to metamorphose between straight-shooter and trickster, a constant adaptability to events as they succeed each other, and above all the foresight to change in a suitable way as the ephemeral opportunities for polymorphism arise.

Cyrus's father Cambyses tells him that when the young are taught "to shoot at a mark," they are shown how to do so without harming their friends, "but, in case there should ever be a war, that you might be able to aim (*stochazesthai*) well at men also." Likewise, the young are instructed "to ensnare (*doloun*) wild boars with nets and pitfalls, and deer with traps and toils...not to confront lions and bears and leopards in a fair fight face to face (*ison kathistamenoï emachesthe*), but instead to try always to contend against them with some villainy (*kakourgioi*) and deceit (*apatai*) and trickery (*doloseis*) and unfair advantage (*pleonexiai*)" (1.6.27-29). They are taught "villainy and deceit and trickery" with animals so that if they should confront an enemy as adults, they will be "prepared...to surprise them in their sleep, when they are in sight to you and while you yourself are unseen" (1.6.35).

Whether it is Ion stepping onto the stage at Epidaurus, Cyrus setting out on a campaign, or Callicles speaking forth in the Athenian assembly, the future is opaque, inhabited by people who are indiscernible, and these three exemplars of the stochastic art

can only aim towards their respective goals as if they were grasping their way along a wall in the dark. The most important thing about feeling one's way into the unknown, says Cambyses, is never to go into any danger "contrary to the omens or the auspices, and bear in mind that men grasp what is to pass by conjecture (*eikazontes*) and do not know what kind of good will come from it....The gods reveal to those to whom they are propitious what they ought to do and what they ought not to do" (1.6.44-46). The primary meaning of *eikazo* is to portray a likeness of something; secondarily, it means to compare by likening one thing to something else, and, as in this example from Herodotus, to conjecture the meaning of an omen, auspice, or some other strange present:

The Scythian princes...dispatched a herald to the Persian camp with presents for the king: these were, a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The Persians asked the bearer to tell them what these gifts might mean, but he made answer that he had no orders except to deliver them, and return again with all speed. If the Persians were wise (*sophoi*), he added, they would find out the meaning for themselves....¹³⁵

In this passage, the Persian king Darius is in a predicament: having invaded Scythia, the Scythians have been leading him all over the country without giving him face-to-face battle. It is as if Darius were a leopard giving chase to young Cyrus, who refuses to confront "leopards in a fair fight face to face." The trickery of the Scythians is to lead the Persians on a wild goose chase, with periodic surprise skirmishes at night while the Persians are at meal, and generally to force the Persians to follow the Scythians around until they deplete their supplies: at which point the Scythians will attack for real. Now Darius holds five Scythian objects lacking in apparent meaning, and he must choose

¹³⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, 4.130.

a line of action based on what they might represent. His insight into the meaning of the Scythians' gifts must be as accurate as a well-placed arrow. His insight or conjecture (*eikazon*) operates through an act of augury (*hiera oionous*: "divine birds") or the interpretation of signs, *semainomai*, which is another word signifying conjecture, one that we are already familiar with from our discussion of Plato's concept of the person. There, a person is *tupos*, character, something shown by a mark or seal (*ensemenasthai*), an oblique gesture or sign, and the close physical connection that would enable it to be noticed and understood. Pressed up against the unknown, Darius gives it as his opinion that the Scythians intend a surrender of themselves and their country, from the Danube to the Don:

This he conjectured (*eikazon*) to be the meaning of the gifts, because the mouse is an inhabitant of the earth, and eats the same foods as man, while the frog passes his life in the water; the bird bears a great resemblance to the horse, and the arrows might signify the surrender of all their power. (4.131-132)

Ridiculously, Darius comes up with the wrong message, he is not propitious, the gods reveal nothing to him, and all of a sudden part of the Scythian army draws out in battle array against the Persians, and seems about to come to an engagement:

But as they stood in battle array, it chanced that a hare started up between them and the Persians, and set to running; when immediately all the Scythians who saw it rushed off in pursuit, with great confusion, and loud cries and shouts. Darius, hearing the noise, inquired the cause of it and was told that the Scythians were all engaged in hunting a hare. On this he turned to those with whom he was wont to converse, and said, "These men do indeed despise us utterly" (4.134)

Like the rhetor, anyone who endeavors to command respect must operate in a field of predictable unpredictability, and be sufficiently quick-witted to metamorphosize

into the shape determined by the moment. And so at the last minute, Darius realizes his mistake and changes his mind about the meaning of the gifts. This shows no weakness on his part. At first, the Persians played the role of the lion, now they must become human: this is where the intelligence of aiming—which Detienne and Vernant call “stochastic intelligence”—comes into its own. Darius’ chief advisor Gobryas thus advises the Persians to play a trick in order to escape face-to-face combat: “when night falls, we light our fires as we do at other times, and leaving behind us on some pretext that portion of our army which is weak and unequal to hardship, taking care also to leave our asses tethered, retreat from Scythia, before our foes march forward....” (4.134)

The deception planned by the Persians in their exit suggests the final element of *eikazo* that remains to be considered as a facet of conjecture: its primary sense of portraying something by means of an image or likeness. One must know when to show one’s face, like a leopard, and when to contrive a ruse, like a human being. Navigate between these two poles, Cambyses advises Cyrus: if the direction of your aim points where there is only unpredictability, you must maintain the keenest adaptability to unforeseen circumstances, as well as to people and places unrecognized, since it will almost always be necessary at some point for you to reverse roles to your own advantage. The gods know all; but humans must rely on the interpretation of signs in a world that is nothing if not fleeting in order to understand each other. In order to succeed in a constantly changing situation, necessity demands even more suppleness, even more

shifting, more polymorphism than the change of circumstance itself.¹³⁶ As Detienne and Vernant have noted, stochastic ability is well represented “as a long journey through the desert (*eremos*) where there are no visible paths and where one must constantly guess the way, aiming at a point on the distant horizon” (311). Thus where the mysterious meaning of the Scythians’ gifts also signifies the unfamiliarity of the territory in which the Persians find themselves, it is by virtue of his stochastic power that Darius is able to find an exit route for the Persians, in a land where “all the paths are unmarked (*hodous ouk epistamenou hoste ou tetmemenon ton hodon*)” (4.136).

Opponents in conjecture must show a measure of sorcery: once again, as when Socrates says of the gods, “do you think that the god is a sorcerer (*goeta*), able to make himself appear (*phantazesthai*) in different forms (*allais ideais*) at different times, sometimes turning himself into different shapes and changing his form (*to hautou eidos eis pollas morphas*), sometimes deceiving us and making us think such things about himself, or do you think that he is simple (*haploun*) and least of all things departs from his form (*ideas*)?”¹³⁷ The god who is *goes* is a shape-shifter, who Socrates says is “able to make himself appear in different forms at different times,” also fits what Hobbes calls “apparition itself,” the living mind in constant imitation and reproduction of rippling, writhing nature. In any confrontation or competitive situation, as Cambyses reminds us, there are two paths to success. The first is to engage in an open fight, where success is determined by superiority in the sphere in which the contest is taking place. The second

¹³⁶ Detienne and Vernant, p. 20.

¹³⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 380d1-6.

is to employ techniques which undo the given order of strengths without altering the appearance of openness, and which put the party expected to win in the position of the weaker.¹³⁸

To return to Plato. What we learn in that context is that there is really only one form of engagement: when facing a lion, there is nothing to do but reverse the natural order of physical strength by devising traps and deceptions; when facing another human, openness can provide the greatest deception. The importance of the opposition between singleness or simplicity, and iridescence and the interplay of reflections, runs like a motif throughout Platonic thought in relation to the state. There, one person will do one job, the individual's soul will be in harmony when each part performs its single function, and the craftsmen applies their skill in conformity to the demands of the state for self-identical individuals. But what must be understood is that the denigration of shimmering metamorphosis to the benefit of self-identical simplicity is a *political* and *stochastic* move on Plato's part. The point of describing rhetors and rhapsodes as unskilled and lacking responsibility for their effects on others is to attack their sovereignty in educational and political affairs. Plato conducts the denigration of rhetoric and rhapsody by means that are highly suspicious from a "philosophical" point of view. Consider that Socrates flatters Ion into agreeing that Ion is divinely inspired, only to lure the rhapsode into the compromising position of admitting that he is not the author of his own actions. This is insinuation in the best rhetorical fashion; it displays Socrates' immense talent in shaping himself in order to reflect the weakness of his interlocutor; it underscores Plato's

¹³⁸ Cf. Detienne and Vernant, p. 13.

use of *mimesis* in speaking through not only Socrates but the entire cast of characters in the dialogues, all in order to make an anti-mimetic point. It has been well noted that Plato places Socrates into highly dramatized settings in which he “speaks differently to different people.”¹³⁹ In this Socrates displays the rhetorical skill of *kairos*, a term referring to opportunism, but which in this context describes Socrates’ ability to foresee and uncover in advance the weakness of his adversaries. The weaknesses of his adversaries are both challenges to discovering the truth as well as opportunities for advancing his challenge to their authority. The difference between what Socrates says and the way he says it, between what Plato writes and what he does with writing, is worth pointing out, and not for the pleasure of unmasking. Rather, the point is to leave Plato intact and to learn by his example. Only we must not look within the Platonic theater for a “Platonic theory of *techne*” that it expostulates and puts into practice. It is as an expert mimetician, not as a philosopher, that Plato gives the perfect representation of *techne* as the Greeks understood it: wily and assertive self-effacement.

Summary

In this chapter, I have shown that versions of productive self-loss, or assertive self-effacement, can be found as a significant part of both ancient and contemporary writing and thinking about the relationship between selfhood, artifice, and power. In the first part of the chapter, I took into consideration Judith Butler’s meditations on the

¹³⁹ David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 190.

production of identity in *The Psychic Life of Power*. I see Butler's work as a potential for thinking about and through Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of liberal individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Both works employ the concept of productive self-loss in the thematization of identity-formation, though they appraise the political implications of self-loss with fundamentally different sensibilities. Horkheimer and Adorno deny legitimacy to a culture that they see enforcing standards of social normality by means of "stamping" mass-produced images of liberal individuality onto everyone and everything. Their appraisal derives from the view that mimetically reproduced forms of normality are the totalitarian and entombing effects of technology gone awry. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler also puts the conceptual language of *mimesis* to use in her excavation of subjectivity, but far from seeing the mimetic construction of identity as the totalizing effect of socialization and normalization, she construes spaces of unexpected yet productive failures within the operations of mimetic power itself. In short, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the evolution of the scientific-technological worldview into an instrument for the inculcation of humans into liberal-bourgeois models of normality represents the terminus for the dialectical inversion of human mastery over things beginning in the sixteenth century. Butler carries the dialectical analysis to its next possible moment, when the subject of *mimesis* unexpectedly inverts its constitutive self-effacement into a mode of self-assertion.

It is in the sense of a device whereby self-effacement produces a surprising moment of self-assertion that I then revisited the ancient Greek concept of *mimesis*, and illustrated the closeness of that term to certain usages of the term *techne*. Forging a chain

linking ancient and contemporary versions of productive self-effacement (not to forget the early modern version put forward in my reading of Hobbes), this chapter sets the stage for addressing any anxieties I might have brought on in the Introduction by asserting the vital place of self-loss in political legitimacy. And so this chapter leads to the next, in which I return to one of the general questions posed by this dissertation: how can political legitimacy be a meaningful way of describing the exercise of power when it is experienced as a kind of self-loss? In the next chapter, “Technology and *Mimesis*, Political Legitimacy and Self-Loss,” I begin to answer that question by criticizing the view that technology is purely instrumental and instrumentalizing, and that it thus threatens the vitality and legitimacy of the political sphere. Moreover, I promote the idea that we might find new ways of being ourselves in a sphere of political action that is technological or artifactual in character, precisely for all its multiplicity and constant change.

CHAPTER FIVE

TECHNOLOGY AND *MIMESIS*, POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND SELF-LOSS**Introduction**

One of the main goals of the last chapter was to show that, far from merely pertaining to Platonic and Hobbesian philosophy, the idea of *mimesis* continues to be built into conceptions of the self in the political theories of the twentieth century. With such an aim in mind, that chapter elucidated the productive features of self-loss through a consideration of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique of liberal individualism in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Judith Butler's conceptualization of the constitutively reflexive evolution of identity *The Psychic Life of Power*. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno theorize science and instrumental technology as comprising a field of ideological and material production, whereby liberal-bourgeois individuality is an effect "stamped" into people through their coerced participation in the markets and apparatuses of mass-production. Yet their denial of legitimacy to liberal-bourgeois regimes arises because they see the mimetic effects of technology only in light of self-effacement. Through my comments on *The Psychic Life of Power*, I found a more suggestive account of the mimetic production of selves, one in which the social construction of individuality is construed to take place as a kind of *mimesis*, but a *mimesis* in which unexpected forms of self-assertion can be imagined as the effect of self-effacement.

My reading of Butler provoked me to take a second look at ancient Greek sources, with respect to which I then reinterpreted *mimesis* as a strategy of assertive self-loss, finding this sense for *mimesis* in its affinities with the concept of *techne*, wily self-assertion. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the point in going back to ancient Greece was to advance beyond the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno. Their view is that technology is to be understood only in its instrumentality, as a field of confinement, a prison-yard of supermalls and fast-food chains, of nuclear families and package vacations. While I certainly find much to agree with in their derision of American consumer culture, what I find lacking in the instrumentalist account of technology—focusing as it does on its disciplinary power and alienating effects—is an awareness that beyond its pure instrumentality, technology has always been an intrinsic part of how humans come into the world, live their lives there, and die.

By drawing a resemblance between ancient and contemporary versions of assertive self-effacement, and aligning the idea of assertive self-effacement with the theme of technology, I move one step closer to my final attempt, in this chapter, at deriving a plausible notion of political legitimacy from experiences of self-loss. But why technology? As the words of the following critic of technology aptly symbolize, the sphere of technology has become an object of political concern for many, and precisely in terms of self-loss: “men export their own vital powers—the ability to move, to experience, to work, and to think—into the devices of their making.”¹⁴⁰ Yet far from fearing technology for its power to take over our lives, it would be more productive to

think about how utterly involved we humans have always been in our technologies, and that it is precisely in those involvements that the necessarily complex relationship between autonomy and self-loss becomes evident. And so after the last chapter's detour through the ancient world, I now return to the current scene and theorize our relationship to technology in terms of *techne*, and political legitimacy in terms of a self-loss that is both productive and unexpectedly assertive.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as we saw in the last chapter, the authors analyze enlightenment as a kind of human power over nature that takes the form of a knowledge that is distinctly technological: “[t]echnology is the essence of this knowledge...[w]hat men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men” (4). Technology in this context represents an instrumental power over things, a capacity for using things as means to an end. For example, we learn about the geological composition of the hillsides in order to extract metals from them, in order to create jobs, in order to manufacture aluminum cans, in order to contain and transport carbonated beverages, in order to refresh thirsty palates, and so on, there is no end to it. Moreover, the power of technology is both instrumental and *instrumentalizing*: instrumental in the sense of bringing about the satisfaction of wants and needs through the manipulation of nature; instrumentalizing in the sense of dissolving human beings themselves in the bubbly stream of its own power. In other words, the effectiveness of converting natural hillsides into pop cans depends to a large extent on organizing human beings as a market for the consumption of soft drinks. My interest in soda is thus not just to quench my

¹⁴⁰ Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 34.

thirst, but in some subtle way to become as content as the actors modeling the beverage on billboards appear to be themselves by quenching a thirst that some marketing department tells me I have.

Horkheimer and Adorno present the dialectic of enlightenment as the unanticipated effect of instrumental technology. The same instrumental outlook that enables the manipulation of nature also transforms humans into the objects of manipulation themselves. My point is that if technology should backfire on human beings, it is all the more unfortunate for the reason that Horkheimer and Adorno presuppose that technology is essentially an instrumental kind of thing: instrumental technological power over the earth ends up instrumentalizing human beings themselves.

The idea that technology represents instrumental power, and that technology must be controlled lest it turns its users into objects of instrumental control, is also well conveyed, though in a distinctively American civic-republican vein, by Langdon Winner in *Autonomous Technology*. In the first part of this chapter, through a critical exchange with political theorists of technology such as Winner, I argue against the thesis of “autonomous technology.” Part of that thesis involves the categorical opposition between technology and politics, as artifice is opposed to authenticity. The argument goes like this: As new technologies continue to give shape to the way we live, we increasingly experience life as something that is removed and alien. In its tendency to give shape to our lives, technology takes away our voice. In the absence of our own voices, political legitimacy is rendered meaningless. I argue that the dichotomization between technological artifice and political authenticity presupposes the same kind of narrow

concept of the self that I criticize in my discussion of Isaiah Berlin. Turning then to a reading of Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" that is inspired by Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's *Creatures of Prometheus*, and drawing on my discussions of *mimesis* and *techne* in the second and fourth chapters, I illustrate how our many-textured relationships with technology can give shape to unexpected forms of self-expression. I thereby present technology less as a threat to human life or autonomy than as the life-giving soil of a shimmering, iridescent and mimetic way of being human.

The reason why I am skeptical of the instrumentalist discourse of technology and the thesis of "autonomous technology" is that they misrepresent the way in which our relationship to the things we make to change the world is already one of "reciprocal interimplication." As Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's work on technology suggests, though capitalist economic arrangements dictate not only the production and distribution of aluminum cans, but also determine their contents and patterns of consumption, that is not necessarily a reason to think of the technology that makes it all possible as instrumentality gone awry.¹⁴¹ Rather, the awareness that we cook, eat, make love, study, work and sleep in ways that have always drawn us into the technologies that enable us to do these things illuminates the artifactual character of being human. Throughout much of the discussion of technology in this chapter, out of a desire to avoid an instrumentalist discourse of analysis, I use the vocabularies of Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm. The range of images and experiences conveyed by these two concepts is

¹⁴¹ Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, *Creatures of Prometheus*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

especially well-suited for the task of presenting technology as a world in which the strict differentiation between human beings and artifacts is non-existent, or at best tenuous. The instrumentalist view of technology, rueful about the domination of mankind by its own creations, doesn't have a lot to go on if the distinction between creator and creation is questionable in the first place. I turn to Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm because of their richness in evoking just such an utterly artifactual character of being human.

Hobbes' Artifactual Man

In this chapter, I want to link Platonic *mimesis*, Hobbesian phantasm and our own relationships with technology today as several instances of assertive self-effacement. So let's return to Hobbes for a moment. If for Hobbes, political power circulates as a phantasm in the minds and bodies of human beings, that is to deny the belief that political bodies, or any other collective arrangements, consist of self-possessed individuals. Joining hands with the physical world, on the one hand, and the social world, on the other, malleable human beings stand in the midst of a "great chain of becoming": of *to einai*, that which does not exist but which does come into being, as Hobbes and Plato would say. The physical world consists of nothing but *to einai*, bodies in motion, and human beings offer no exception: I also am a moved body, and that is because the physical world takes possession of me. At the other end of the chain, to invoke Hobbes' imagery again, we come to Leviathan, the amazing artifice set in motion by humans:

Nature (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the *art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can

make an artificial animal...For what is the *heart*, but a *spring*, and the *nerves*, but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer? *Art* goes yet further, imitating that rational and most excellent work of nature, *man*. For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, (in Latin CIVITAS) which is but an Artificial Man....¹⁴²

An imitation of nature, the state is also the mirror of man, and to that extent it speaks and acts in the voice and gesture of its authors. But as we noted in the third chapter, Leviathan is also “of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defense it was intended”; its sovereignty and our obedience take the form of a subtle reversal in the relation between artificer and artifice:

But as men, for the attaining of peace, and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an artificial man, which we call a common-wealth; so also have they made artificial chains, called *civil laws*, which they themselves, by mutual covenants, have fastened at one end, to the lips of that man, or assembly, to whom they have given the sovereign power; and at the other end to their own ears. (138)

We are certainly no longer in the world of Pascal, for whom it might have been possible to achieve a believing obedience by listening directly to one’s own prayers:

To obtain anything from God, the outward must be joined to the inward; that is to say we must kneel and pray alone, etc., so that proud man, who would not submit to God, may now be subject to the body.¹⁴³

Hobbes knew perfectly well that “proud man” already has a god that speaks through him: Leviathan, “king over all the children of pride”;¹⁴⁴ and it is from the moving

¹⁴² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Pascal, p. 1219: "Il faut que l'extérieur soit joint à l'intérieur pour obtenir de Dieu; c'est-à-dire que l'on se mette à genoux, prie des lèvres, etc., afin que l'homme orgueilleux, qui n'a voulu se soumettre à Dieu, soit maintenant soumis à la créature."

¹⁴⁴ Job 41:34.

lips of Leviathan, not from those of “proud man,” that we obtain peace. After all, “nothing is more easily broken than a man’s word” (73). Leviathan is literally amazing because with its creation, the expected relationship between creator and creature is reversed: instead of the creator moving the creature, it is the other way around. When the creator hears what the creature says, it is his master’s voice. And not only his voice. As John Locke may have learned from Hobbes, the very character of legitimate governmental regulation is to promote habits of thought and behavior consistent with high regard for the sanctity of the commonwealth:

Political Power then I take to be *a Right* of making Laws with Penalties of Death, and consequently all less Penalties, for the Regulating and Preserving of Property, and of employing the force of the Community, in the Execution of such Laws, and in the defense of the Common-wealth from Foreign Injury, and all this only for the Publick Good.¹⁴⁵

Artificers making mutual covenants become political artifacts, that is, citizens, proud men subject to a body politic. For Hobbes, the willful, active, and self-determining quality of the political creature is located not in the souls of individual subjects but in the sovereignty of the commonwealth: “the *sovereignty* is an artificial *soul*, giving life and motion to the whole body,”¹⁴⁶ not excluding the bodies, habits, and states of mind of citizens.

And now, turning towards the physical world, the erstwhile artificers touch nature with hands that are no longer their own (if they ever were), because their hands belong to Leviathan. If the physical world moves, it is because we have touched it, but it is moved

¹⁴⁵ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 268.

¹⁴⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 3.

in order to reflect the good of the community that touches us with its apparatuses, techniques, organizations and networks. As Locke says, the world belongs to “the Industrious and Rational,” that is, to citizens, not to “the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious” (291). So while Hobbes envisions the state as a marvelous contrivance, as a machine to mirror and control God’s mechanism, the human being, Locke’s socio-economic perspective allows us to see that it is not necessarily the commonwealth alone that moves and is moved by the bodies of its members. Instead, we must address the apparent sovereignty of an entire world made up of tools, instruments, machines, appliances, weapons, gadgets, skills, methods, procedures, routines, factories, workshops, bureaucracies, armies, research and development teams, and large-scale systems that link people across great distances of time and space: what Langston Winner calls *technics*: the “vast, diverse ubiquitous totality that stands at the center of modern culture” (9-12). These currents of imitation and self-loss flow back and forth between the physical world and the state: caught in the middle, “industrious” human beings create changes in a world that constantly changes them. Surrounded by artifacts made out of nature and the artifact of the state, technics takes possession of the artificer on every side, and suddenly we have arrived at the “strange and unlikely” hypothesis of autonomous technology—“the belief that somehow technology has gotten out of control and follows its own course, independent of human direction” (13). Is this the only way to look at artifactual politics?

Technology versus Politics, Sorcerers versus Philosophers

Is the legitimacy of artifactual politics to be understood as the respect bestowed upon the exercise of power in a technological society, “the system of order and governance appropriate to a universe made artificial”?¹⁴⁷ I hope we will all agree that it is not, if Winner is correct in attributing to the technological society “the plight of the human race.” Not if by a universe made artificial we mean rational-productive systems that “cut life into segments of a socio-technical network,” and that “extract psychological punishment from their human members without match by the opportunity for personal fulfillment.” Not if by “technological society” we mean a society that brings personal, social, and political powerlessness to its constituents, in which people have little “real voice” in the most important arrangements affecting their activities. And not if by autonomous technology, we mean that intelligence and creative participation by humans are rendered unnecessary. Above all, political legitimacy shouldn’t refer to any state of affairs in which

one simply joins the consensus; one consents to a myriad of choices made, things built, procedures followed, services rendered. Autonomous technology demands a submissive, compliant way of life. It asks us to mete out the responsibility for our daily existence to remote large-scale systems. Organized institutions in the technological society frustrate rather than serve human needs such as health, shelter, nutrition and education. Rather than elicit the best qualities of the persons they employ or serve, they systematically evoke the smallest, the least creative, least trusting, least loving, and least lovable traits in everyone. (321-322)

¹⁴⁷ Winner, p. 237.

At the center of this bleak diagnosis, which is basically liberal in its anxious protectiveness of human autonomy, is the belief that “the maladies technology brings derive from its tendency to structure and incorporate that which it touches.”¹⁴⁸ From other critics of different kinds of technology, too, do we hear about contagious technology, and not only as the World Wide Web is said to carry viruses threatening to destroy our hard drives. As Jodi Dean points out in her critical assessment of certain trends in technophobia today, the Internet is said to allow the uncontrolled exchange of ideas, conspiracies, and rumors that might “infect our thinking”:¹⁴⁹

If society’s susceptibility to misinformation is like AIDS, then Web sites, Internet news groups, and electronic bulletin boards—a vast thrilling promiscuous commingling of facts with fabrications—could be its bathhouses.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, “the displacement of subjectivity, [and] the adoption of identities and sexualities with which we might experiment and play” permitted by the widespread use of Internet chat rooms, bulletin boards, and electronic mail “foster sound bite decision-making rather than sound political judgment,”¹⁵¹ while “the commingling of various sources, cultures, and claims [on the Internet] are...threats to science, democracy, and,

¹⁴⁸ Winner, p. 320.

¹⁴⁹ Jodi Dean, "Virtual Fears," *Signs: Journal of Women in Cultural and Society* (1999), vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 1069-1078.

¹⁵⁰ Kurt Anderson, "The Age of Unreason," *New Yorker*, February 3, 40-43, quoted by Jodi Dean, "Virtual Fears," p. 1073.

¹⁵¹ Benjamin Barber, "The New Telecommunications Technology: Endless Frontier or the End of Democracy?" *Constellations* (1997), vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 208-228.

indeed, reason itself.”¹⁵² The risks that technology appears to present to our ideas about reality and real voices, as well as the threat to our identities for fear of a “commingling” of selves, is not modern but goes back to the fear of what Plato called *goes* and *mimesis*. The god who is *goes*, meaning “sorcerer” or “wizard,” is a shape-shifter, someone who “juggles” his image. The *goes* is nothing but shifting images, there is nothing else there besides constantly changing images. In Plato, the poet, and the mimetic actor, are also said to be “wizards” (*goes*) capable of seducing the members of their audiences away from their own selves.¹⁵³ According to Plato, as we have already seen, it is precisely in terms of self-loss that *mimesis* is found to contradict the principle of order in a community. And the argument goes much farther, or rather Plato repeats it on the scale of the individual, in that the reasons why *mimesis* violates the social order is precisely that it also contradicts the individual order.

Winner agrees that the root idea of autonomous technology is nothing new: “its origins are as old as the tale of Prometheus fashioning the human race from clay, the story of man’s creation in *Genesis*, or any number of similar accounts in world religions that depict the human species as an autonomous artifact of the gods. In this regard the notion of a living technology merely recapitulates the myths of our own beginnings—the

¹⁵² As reported by Dean, whose own view is that this sort of paranoia simply reflects the insecurities of entrenched authority in scientific, ethical and political spheres. Furthermore, she claims that technophobia of this nature only serves to justify the reassertion of “certain normative forms of sex, exchange, and interaction” by the forms of authority that the proliferation of new technologies threatens. See Jodi Dean, “Virtual Fears,” p. 1067.

¹⁵³ Plato, *Republic* 598c6-d5.

rebellion and fall of man—and the ensuing harvest of troubles.”¹⁵⁴ The great insight here is that humans are themselves artifacts—better, that we are by nature both autonomous and artificial, that is, *mimetic*. The putative difference between modern and ancient myths of technology is that with the creation of man, the artificer transgresses against the designs of God its creator; with autonomous technology, the creator actually takes on the character of its own creation, and conforms to the design of its own technology (33). In either case, the artifact won’t behave according to plan, because in being imitated, *it imitates the sovereignty of its creator*. In one of its earliest appearances in the English language, *mimesis* means exactly this: “Satan called here (by a Mimesis) the god of this world, not simply and properly, but because he challenges to himself the honor of a god.”¹⁵⁵ In 1685, Satan is known as the “god of the world” because he “challenges” to himself the station of his creator—the station of God. Not half a century earlier, Hobbes noted that “the great LEVIATHAN...is but an artificial man,” and in creating a commonwealth, humans imitate “the art whereby God hath made and governs the world.”¹⁵⁶ And we are not really all that far from Plato’s mimetician either, who also appears as an imposter, as somebody who lays hold to the glory of kings. Recall when Plato asks whether the painter is not also capable of producing an entire world:

...there are beds and tables in the world....but there are only two ideas or forms of them—one the idea of a bed, the other of a table....the maker of either of them makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea...but no artificer makes the ideas themselves....there is

¹⁵⁴ Winner, p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Mimesis.”

¹⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 9.

another artist....one who is the maker of all the works of all other workmen....who is able to make not only vessels of every kind, but plants and animals, himself and all other things—the earth and heaven, and the things which are in heaven or under the earth; he makes the gods also....the painter is just such a creator of appearances...what he creates is untrue. And yet is there not a sense in which the painter also creates a bed?¹⁵⁷

The mimetician not only impersonates the things of the world, but he also impersonates the king himself, the creator-god of all that exists. To the extent that this god creates the original ideas that are copied by humans, the mimetician copies the originating power of the king himself.

Of course, this is all highly paradoxical: how can anything be the imitation of an original, if one of the attributes of an original is that it is the copy of nothing? Yet as we have seen, Plato combats the danger posed by *mimesis* by means of this paradox, as when his philosophers achieve self-sameness through imitation of the Forms, and when everyone else imitates the philosophers. The exercise of power in Plato's ideal city rests upon the successful "impressionization" of essentially mimetic human beings into the shape of a god who does not change his shape: this is what it takes to create political subjects. I call this assertive self-effacement. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes links human beings who are essentially moved bodies to the voice and gesture of their creation, the state. Hobbesian artificiality amounts less to a juridical transfer of natural right from subject to representative than to what Hobbes calls a "perpetual embrace" in which each subject loses its identity in the other. The danger, as Plato and Hobbes saw it, was that left to their own devices, essentially malleable people would never be able to establish justice or

¹⁵⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 596b1-e11.

even merely commodious living among themselves. Within the theoretical framework of a Plato or a Hobbes, it is hard to imagine how to maintain even the most basic forms of congeniality afforded by regular and familiar contact in everyday life when nobody is anybody in particular.

Today, technology reposes the problem of contagious and socrerous *mimesis*, as “human life transferred into artifice”:

Men export their own vital powers—the ability to move, to experience, to work, and to think—into the devices of their making. They then experience this life as something removed and alien, something that comes back at them from another direction. In this way the experience of men’s lives becomes entirely vicarious.¹⁵⁸

But as the examples of Plato and Hobbes show, the view that *mimesis* has to be an “export of vital powers” is far from universal. The loss of human power over artifacts might equally appear in a more positive light, as the productive capacity to be moved and recreated by them. Not so for Winner, however, to whom technological *mimesis* represents a set of pathologies to the political sphere:

...modern technics, much more than politics as conventionally understood, now legislates the conditions of human existence. New technologies are institutional structures within an evolving constitution that gives shape to a new polity, the technopolis in which we do increasingly live. For the most part, this constitution still evolves with little public scrutiny or debate. Shielded by the conviction that technology is neutral and tool-like, a whole new order is built—piecemeal, step by step, with the parts and pieces linked together in novel ways—without the slightest public awareness or opportunity to dispute the character of the changes underway....Silence is its distinctive mode of speech. (323-324)

¹⁵⁸ Winner, p. 34.

As I see it, the danger of the “pathological” reading of technological politics is that it rests upon an untenable opposition between the technological and the political. The opposition of politics to technology rests on the uncritical acceptance of the view that “technology,” representing the sphere of artifice, enslavement, and mediatization, should be mastered by humans in the domain of “politics,” which represents spontaneity, consciousness, will and self-determination. The alternative to a politics that masters its technology is autonomous technology: “a collection of systems that increase the general feeling of powerlessness, enhance the prospects for the dominance of technical elites, create the belief that politics is nothing more than a remote spectacle to be experienced vicariously, and thereby diminish the chance that anyone would take democratic citizenship seriously” (325).

Politics and Technology, Voice and Silence, Being and Acting?

It appeals to our everyday way of thinking about political legitimacy to say that technology spells trouble when devices and systems in telecommunications, computing, medicine, mass production, transportation, agriculture and so forth appear to structure the lives of people in ways that exclude their active and informed participation. The ideal of legitimacy here is a “public” whose participation legitimates the outcomes of policy debates about technology because it speaks on its own behalf. The alternative is silent compliance with the right of owners of political, economic and scientific capital to have primary say over the shape of new technologies.

The key political idea in this approach seems to be that the public sphere exists wherever the void of silence is run through with political speech, and that political speech consists minimally of those whose activities and even consciousnesses are embedded in technological innovations deliberating with each other about their needs, viewpoints and priorities. There is certainly plenty of support for this view in the American tradition of democratic thought. Following one of the major thrusts of American political thought, for instance, Winner cites approvingly Hannah Arendt's adoption of the Jeffersonian concept of the public sphere as "the man-made public space or market-place which antiquity had known as the area where freedom appears and becomes visible to all."¹⁵⁹ Through the principle of the public sphere, "every man in the State" can become "an acting member of the Common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties, subordinate indeed, yet important, and entirely within his competence" (253). It is the existence of a public sphere, the only "space where freedom can appear" (125), that subjects have "the opportunity of *being* republicans and of *acting* as citizens."¹⁶⁰ According to Arendt, the essence of legitimacy consists in the multitude of opinions formed in the "process of open discussion and public debate."¹⁶¹ In the absence of a public sphere, political legitimacy cannot be, since it is upon the plurality of opinion formed in public deliberation that political legitimacy rests.

¹⁵⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 124.

¹⁶⁰ Langdon Winner, "Citizen Virtues in a Technological Order," *Inquiry*, 35, p. 350. Winner cites Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 253.

¹⁶¹ Arendt, p. 268.

However, there is hardly public “silence” in the matter of technological innovation: every day, the newspapers, radio, television and untold informal conversations are filled to the brim with praise, criticism, conjecture, opinion and judgment about the Internet, genetically modified foods, the breakup of Microsoft, the death penalty, the price of gas, and countless other examples of the way that technology shapes who we are and the way we live. The problem is not of silence *per se*, since as Winner puts it, even silence is a “mode” of speaking, but a concept of *politically significant* silence. The underlying argument seems to be that we have the wrong *kind* of speaking when it comes to forming an opinion about the legislating impact of technology upon our lives. It is not *political*: it might as well be silence. When Winner claims that elites silence the public sphere by transforming open political debate into whispers behind closed doors, we should probe a little deeper and ask what conception of speech underlies the ideal of politics generally and the public sphere, the only “space where freedom can appear,” where subjects have “the opportunity of *being* republicans and of *acting* as citizens.”.

Being and *acting* may strike the reader as an odd pairing of words. Nevertheless, “being” and “acting” are taken as equivalents by Winner, because far from being understood as artifice, “acting” is in this context synonymous with “self-mastery.” To see this, recall Hanna Pitkin’s interpretation of the concept of acting in Hobbes’ political thought as the possession of the right to do something. Hobbes writes that an actor acts by authority, and “that which in speaking of goods and possessions, is called an *owner*, and in Latin *dominus*, in Greek *kurios*; speaking of actions is called author. And as the

right of possession, is called dominion; so the right of doing any action, is called AUTHORITY.”¹⁶² The public sphere serves as the basis of political freedom because where people “communicate freely with one another and have the right to make their views public,”¹⁶³ they have no other authority or master than themselves. Where people cannot speak freely, that is, for themselves, they are not free: for their authority to act is not their own. Thus *being* republican amounts to *acting* as a citizen, where, oddly, “acting” means really being oneself, not personating the needs and priorities of another. It is precisely by acting on their own authority that citizens are republicans. At this point, we cannot help but be reminded once again of Plato’s distinction between simple narrative or *haple diegesis* and imitation, or *mimesis*:

[In simple narration], the poet is speaking in his own person; he never leads us to suppose that he is any one else...But when the poet speaks in the person of another, may we not say that he assimilates his style to that of the person who, as he informs you, is going to speak?...And this assimilation of himself to another, either by the use of voice or gesture, is the imitation of the person whose character he assumes...and in this case the narrative or the poet may be said to proceed by way of imitation.¹⁶⁴

On the one hand, there is politics, the domain of citizens speaking in their own voices. On the other hand, there is technology, the domain of artifice, not of self-mastery but of alienation. The trouble with technological politics is not therefore that the winds of silence have blown away public discussion, since talk about technology surrounds us all the time. The trouble is that talk about technology takes place in the wrong sort of

¹⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 101.

¹⁶³ Arendt, p. 227.

¹⁶⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 393a5-c7.

voice. What really bothers Winner about technology is not what he thinks: that the authority of the people has been absconded with. Rather, isn't the real problem that the people have too much of the wrong kind of authority, not that political action is impossible, but that *acting* is no longer synonymous with *being*? Winner is stuck in a model of political legitimacy that depends on the "simple narrative" model of public speech and political action. According to his view, popular authority cannot validate the effects of "autonomous technology" because in the tendency of technology "to structure and incorporate that which it touches," *it has taken away our real voices.*

In the end, since political legitimacy is said to originate in the opinions of those who are governed, the problem is one of restoring to the people their real (i.e., public and political) voices. The question though, is still: what kind of voices should these be? Under democratic conditions, when both the exercise and legitimation of political power theoretically originates in the people, the bestowal of legitimacy would seem to require some kind of mutual respect among those whose voices fill the public space. This respect could be fostered through the process of open and public discussion. But political theorists of technology such as Winner implicitly support themselves with Madison's argument against the "democratic" view that republican freedom is meant to prevent the popular expression of authority from becoming undignified Protean madness. If the worth of a republican state rests upon the opinion of a non-Protean public, it needs citizens who speak in voices that are their own and nobody else's. And that takes us back to Plato, who teaches us that such citizens must be *produced*, that we do not speak in our

own voices by nature, that the citizen speaking in his or her own voice is the foundation of justice as well as its end product; this citizen is both artificer and artifact of the state.

Obviously, none of this will suggest that technology is neutral, available to use for good or bad, as claimed by this political theorist of technology:

For technology remains a tool: allied to particular conceptions of democracy, if we know what kind of democracy we want, it can enhance civic communication and expand citizen literacy.¹⁶⁵

Technology is not a tool because it is so much more, it is a political phenomenon, and not only because its uses are so highly contested and controversial. The problem is that according to conventional trends in American democratic thought, it is difficult to imagine how politics and technology could not be essentially separate, even opposed. Even with Winner's suggestion that technology be politicized, what he means is that technology be made the subject of political debate, that it be contained within the public sphere, that social relations dominated by technology be remade to conform to the norms of participatory democratic politics. And other political theorists of technology perpetuate the conceptual separation of technology and politics by defining the "democratization of technology" in a similar way:

...it is important not to confuse [market] responsiveness with democratic control of technology. While markets in many goods are surely desirable, they lack the public character, the element of debate and conscious coordination, that we associate with democratic action....Democratization of technical change means granting actors who lack financial, cultural, or political capital access to the design process.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Barber, p. 210.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 5-7.

In other words, the politicization of technology amounts to a democratic “intervention” *into* the design process of egg hatching farms, nuclear power stations, compact disc players, sports stadiums, and countless other devices and technical arrangements that shape our way of life. I place the emphasis on *into* because it symbolizes the persistence of a dichotomous and aggressively dominating mode of theorizing the proper attitude of politics towards technology. Technology affects everything from the way we are entertained and the way we communicate to the way we are born, healed, and buried. But despite the fact that technology is, as Winner puts it, thus a kind of legislation, I deny that the legitimacy of legislating technology depends on the “prudent judgment of citizens who participate in deliberative, self-governing communities.”¹⁶⁷

The technological disease, if there is one, ought to be cured with a dose of its own poison: recall that according to Winner, “the maladies technology brings derive from its tendency to structure and incorporate that which it touches.”¹⁶⁸ One path to a politically legitimate technology may lie in Winner’s suggestion that technology be *politicized*, that is, *touched by*, *taken control of* and *incorporated into*, politics. The problem with Winner’s view is that it theorizes politicization as the insertion of a “moral community or public space in which technological issues are topics for deliberation, debate, and shared action”¹⁶⁹ within the sphere of technology. But if “the maladies technology brings derive

¹⁶⁷ Barber, p. 220.

¹⁶⁸ Winner, p. 320.

¹⁶⁹ Winner, p. 351.

from its tendency to structure and incorporate that which it touches,” what difference would it make if we established “appropriate roles and institutions [with] the goal of defining the common good in technology policy”?¹⁷⁰ How would the democratic settlement of the technological sphere protect itself against reinfection?

The idea of a technology that is political does not necessarily call for the insertion of a “moral community” into the domain of technological activity (or the containment of technology by the public sphere, depending on how one views it). Yet it also remains the case that as the legislative power of technology expands, we should not stop asking whether or not its influence is proper. But it seems to me that the terms of the debate are set in the wrong terms. There are ways of thinking about power that do not derive legitimacy from democratic participation in a public sphere, and about technology in terms other than the design, production and use of artifacts. Both of these views miss the point and the promise of technology for political legitimacy. Technology has always been part of human life, not as a subset of it but as the very context in which human life takes place, grows, and flourishes and dies. Technology and politics have ever been intertwined and mutually reinforced spheres of human activity. By a technological society, then, I imagine not a relation between people mediated by tools, but a relation between people characterized by *techne*, by the human attributes of intelligence, cunning and artistry.

¹⁷⁰ Winner, p. 355.

The Question Concerning Technology, not Dialectic of Enlightenment

At this point, I want to return to the criticism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, where I wrote that Horkheimer and Adorno present the dialectic of enlightenment as the unanticipated effect of *instrumental* technology. That is, the same instrumental outlook that enables the manipulation of nature also transforms humans into the objects of manipulation themselves. My point was that if technology should backfire on human beings, it is all the more unfortunate for the reason that Horkheimer and Adorno presuppose that technology is essentially an instrumental kind of thing: instrumental technological power over the earth ends up instrumentalizing human beings themselves. But, I added, the instrumentalist discourse of technology that Horkheimer and Adorno presuppose is faulty because it misrepresents the way in which our relationship to the things we make to change the world is already one of “reciprocal interimplication.” In this I am very much in agreement with Timothy Kaufman-Osborn’s work on technology, which suggests that even though technological arrangements dictate not only the production and distribution, of consumable objects, but also determine the contents and patterns of consumption, that is not necessarily a reason to think of the technology that makes it all possible as instrumentality gone awry.¹⁷¹ Rather, the awareness that all the things we do occur in ways that have always been utterly and circularly implicated in the ways that technology enables us to do them illuminates the artifactual character of being human. I now turn to Martin Heidegger’s

¹⁷¹ Kaufman-Osborn, p. 31.

essay “The Question Concerning Technology” as the source for Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of instrumental technology, but I read that essay in order to repair some of the damage caused by their failure to perceive technology in terms any other than the instrumental.

In a reading of Heidegger inspired by Kaufman-Osborn, I present technology not as a threat to human life or autonomy but as the life-giving soil of a shimmering, iridescent and mimetic way of being human. Supple and shifting, always in motion and as polymorphic as circumstance itself, we might all become the proprietors of a face that glitters whenever it moves its lips. That is, through a continual back-and-forth between merging with and emerging from the polymorphic world that surrounds us, I intend that we might see ourselves as beings that are as artificial as we are dazzling, capable of unexpected ways of asserting ourselves in the very course of becoming lost in the worlds of artifice that embrace us.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger reminds us that the making and using of tools refers to only one aspect of our relation to technology. As a tool, an artifact of technology appears to be something that is essentially neutral, valuable only as a means to some end. From this point of view, my bicycle is a tool that I use in order to get to school. In itself, the bicycle is neutral. If it is good or bad, that is so only in relation to the consequences of using it: for instance, I might hit someone while racing to campus, or the chain might derail, either of which would have the consequence of me being late to class. Even when the tool called a bicycle works and I do not hit anybody, that says nothing about its intrinsic value. When the brakes stop the wheels, when the

derailleur shifts the chain between the gears, when the spokes do not bend and the tires do not blow, that describes a good tool only insofar as I am able to use it to achieve my goal, which is to get to school. Only in light of such consequences is the bicycle good or bad, and in this light, my main consideration is simply to keep the bike in working condition and to keep it under control while I am using it.

However, while speeding along, I know that I am frequently on the verge of losing control, and of hitting the ground, if not my fellow cyclists. In these circumstances, the bicycle must occupy my constant attention, and focusing even for a moment on wild flowers growing along the bike path could quickly and violently destroy my instrumental relationship to the bicycle. Admiring a California poppy and hitting a pothole at the same time, the bicycle is no longer a tool that helps me get to school with ease and speed, but instead it becomes an adversary which either I must control or which will control me by throwing me down onto the pavement. This moment of adversity, however, encapsulates in a dramatic way the essence of the instrumental view of technology as a whole. According to Heidegger, the entire instrumental conception of technology can be summed up by the dictum: We will master it (5).

Yet the view that technology is something that we must master or which will master us presupposes that we already conceive of technology and humans as distinct categories of things, if for no other reason than that each is defined in opposition to the other. Such a view of technology is well encapsulated by Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's critical notion of "the Cartesian paradigm of use," which "assumes that human creators and manufactured creatures are in principle distinguishable, [and] which is the condition

of the former's mastery over the latter.”¹⁷² From a Cartesian or instrumental perspective, then, the will to mastery is so much more than a matter of using tools to achieve ends. It is precisely through the neutrality of artifacts, through their apparent detachment from human life, that we humans are possessed of a tremendous insight into ourselves: that a human being is not an artifact, but a master and exploiter of tools.

Heidegger warns us that “we are delivered over to [technology] in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral” (4). The problem, however, is not that in confronting technology as something neutral, we run the risk of losing mastery over it. The real threat to humanity “does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology” (28). Instead, the danger lies in mistaking mastery over nature for the real conditions of human freedom:

When man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research....Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over man. But that destiny is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears, and not one who is simply constrained to obey. (19, 25)

On the one hand, if humans manipulate or “ensnare” nature as an “object of research,” that is possible only because such a way of approaching nature already “holds complete sway” over us. Thus it is our destiny, not our autonomy, that is revealed by an instrumental conception of technology. On the other hand, the destiny of humans to instrumentalize nature and to treat the artifactual world as something to be mastered is not the same thing as fate, or the absence of freedom. What is decisive is whether or not

¹⁷² Kaufman-Osborn, p. 2.

we humans “hear” that alongside the world of artifacts, we are under a sort of necessity of our own, that we are not essentially distinct from technology, but that we depend upon the technological world for our very freedom. We depend on it for our freedom because the technological world is precisely where human existence comes into play, where technology means *techne*, which Heidegger interprets as “to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it” (13).

Take a house for example. A modern American house is a complex system of artifacts. Comprising electrical, mechanical, chemical and hydraulic components, as well as others I am blissfully unaware of, it is a technological system in itself. Connected to power and water lines, sewer systems, blended into the asphalt of the driveway and the cement of the sidewalk, positioned on the very lot where it stands, the house is also part of vast systems of electrical, hydraulic and material technologies that extend beyond it. As an artifact, a house is brought into existence through the activities of property developers, government officials and neighborhood planning committee members who determine how many stories it will have, how far back from the street it must be set, how many people may inhabit it, and all the other qualities that define the house as a house and not as a commercial or industrial edifice or as a playground or nature preserve. Then there are the architects, carpenters, electricians, cement pourers, framers, plumbers, in short, all those who use manufactured goods such as lumber, nails, windows, copper and zinc pipes, dry wall, plastic electric outlet covers, the whole range of items that go into what the experts have defined as a house. And of course, there are the future inhabitants of the house, who bring the house into existence by supplying a demand for houses, by

procuring a loan from a mortgage company, by hiring various specialists to verify that the house is not rotting or infested by ants, or that it is not about to slide down the driveway and onto the street. The inhabitants also bring the house into existence by giving it finishing touches such as wallpaper, Art-Deco light fixtures, exterior paint, paintings on the wall, carpets on the floors, and more, even the nicks and scratches on the kitchen cabinets bring the house into existence as a place where people live, as opposed to a mansion restored as a museum or a place of worship. Political officials, property developers, construction teams and the inhabitants all approach the house as a means to an end. The planners see it as a means of developing the neighborhood. The architects and workers see it as a means of making money. Most generally, the inhabitants see it as a place to live, and as a means of keeping out of the cold in the winter and out of the sun during the summer. They also view the house as a means of advancing their social status, since this is their first house, they used to rent.

But the house also exemplifies technology in what Heidegger means by *techne*, “to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it.” Each group acts according to their understanding and expertise with respect to the means at hand, that is their expertise in zoning codes and granting permits, in computer assisted drafting, in nailing, pouring, gluing, and so forth, in paying their credit card bills on time and not bouncing checks so as to be eligible for a loan, the house is a place where everyone’s understanding and expertise comes into play. Moreover, the house is a place where children play, parents cook, pets chew on furniture, siblings argue, spouses silently so, in short, it is where a family lives. Those who bring the house into existence are also

brought into existence by it. The same could be true of the state or of any other contrivance:

By the “essence of a house” and the “essence of a state” we mean the ways in which the house and the state hold sway. It means city hall inasmuch as there the life of the community gathers and village existence is constantly in play, i.e., comes into presence. (30)

The danger posed by the instrumental approach to technology is that in our instrumentality, we will blind ourselves to the fact that the technological sphere is where we walk, talk, eat, smell, sleep, shout, sing, scream, it is where we get cold and where we perspire, it is where we exercise our bodily functions and the operations of the mind, it is where we make a mess and where we make things neat, it is in short where we live and where we die. The technological sphere “holds sway” over us. In practice, the distinction between the technological and the human is not so great, in fact, there is no chance of being human without technology, technology ever holds sway over the way we appear as mortal beings, that is, the way we are. Recognizing that we become human through technology is what Heidegger means when he opens the essay with this cryptic suggestion:

The relationship to [technology] will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. (3)

Our relation to technology will be free, in other words, if we “hear” that we are not autonomous masters of the earth, if we “listen” to the ways in which human existence is brought forth by artifacts, if we “see” that humans are only as enduring as the artifacts through which they make an appearance. Freedom, we might say, means not confronting artifacts in a never-ending struggle to keep them under our control, but instead giving

artifacts their due: letting them bring human existence into play, as veils give form to the faces they cover:

Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils. (25)

This passage from Heidegger reminds me of Hobbes' exhortation to his reader in *De Corpore*, to "imitate the Creation" by letting "your Reason move upon the Deep of your own Cogitations and Experience."¹⁷³ A mist hovering over the deep at the inception of creativity shimmers like a veil, all at once giving form, taking control and getting lost in the void and darkness of that which it conceals. A veil gives form to the face it covers at the same time as it hides the face. In both passages, at the risk of committing an egregious anthropologism, I see the idea of productive self-effacement. If "the state holds sway" in the sense that "there the life of the community gathers and village existence is constantly in play," it would be less as threat to human autonomy than as what I have called the life-giving soil of a shimmering, iridescent and mimetic way of being political. Supple and shifting, always in motion and as polymorphic as circumstance itself, we might all become the proprietors of a face that glitters whenever it moves its lips. That is, through a continual back-and-forth between merging with and emerging from the metamorphic world that surrounds us, we adopt its nature for our own, and become as artificial as we are dazzling, capable of unexpected ways of asserting ourselves in the very course of becoming lost in the worlds of artifice that embrace us.

¹⁷³ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, Authors Epistle to the Reader.

Summary

In this chapter, I use the example of what Timothy Kaufman-Osborn calls our multiple and many-textured entanglements with technology as a “case study” of legitimate self-loss. The reason why I target our relationships with technology in order to suggest a plausible theory of legitimate self-loss is that technology has become the source of profound anxiety among many people, precisely for fear that we risk losing our autonomy to it. Yet far from fearing technology because it threatens our autonomy, and thus the legitimacy of the political sphere, I urge us to be at home in a sphere of political existence coextensive with technology precisely for all its multiplicity and constant movement.

In the first section of this chapter, in order to evoke a sense of technology as a world comprised of artifacts in which human beings are inextricably and dynamically intertwined, I turn to the vocabularies of Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm. Such a view of technology I intend as an alternative to the perspective on technology taken up by Horkheimer and Adorno. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as we saw in the last chapter, the authors analyze enlightenment as a kind of human power over nature that takes the form of a knowledge that is distinctly technological. Moreover, the power of technology is both instrumental and *instrumentalizing*: instrumental in the sense of bringing about the satisfaction of wants and needs through the manipulation of nature; instrumentalizing in the sense of dissolving human beings themselves in the stream of its own power. My point against Horkheimer and Adorno was that if technology should

backfire on human beings, it is all the more unfortunate for the reason that they presuppose that technology is essentially an instrumental kind of thing: instrumental technological power over the earth ends up instrumentalizing human beings themselves. Echoing the sentiment of Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's work, I added that the instrumentalist discourse of technology that Horkheimer and Adorno presuppose is faulty because it misrepresents the way in which our relationship to the things we make to change the world is already one of what Kaufman-Osborn calls "reciprocal interimplication." Even though technological arrangements dictate not only the production and distribution, of consumable objects, but also determine the contents and patterns of consumption, that is not necessarily a reason to think of the technology that makes it all possible as instrumentality gone awry.¹⁷⁴ Rather, the awareness that all the things we do occur in ways that have always been utterly and circularly implicated in the ways that technology enables us to do them illuminates the artifactual character of being human.

The idea that technology represents instrumentality, and that technology must be controlled lest it turns its users into objects of instrumental control, is well conveyed by Langdon Winner in *Autonomous Technology*. In the second part of this chapter, through a critical exchange with political theorists of technology such as Winner, I argued against the thesis of "autonomous technology." Part of that thesis involves the categorical opposition between technology and politics, as artifice is opposed to authenticity: as new technologies continue to give shape to the way we live, we increasingly experience life as

¹⁷⁴ Kaufman-Osborn, p. 31.

something that is removed and alien. In its tendency to give shape to our lives, technology takes away our voice. In the absence of our own voices, political legitimacy is rendered meaningless. I argued that the dichotomization between technological artifice and political authenticity presupposes an understanding of what it is to offer meaningful consent that is liberal in the narrow sense I criticize in my discussion of Isaiah Berlin in the Introduction.

In the second part of this chapter, I continue my criticism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by turning to a reading of Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" that is inspired by Timothy Kaufman-Osborn's *Creatures of Prometheus*. Through my reading of Heidegger's essay and my criticism of the thesis of autonomous technology, I present both technology and politics as entities less antithetical to human life or autonomy than as what I have called the life-giving soil of a shimmering, iridescent and mimetic way of being human. Reading Langston Winner and Hannah Arendt through and against my interpretations of Plato and Hobbes, I imagine human beings as the impermanent inheritors of their own artifactual circumstances, perpetually metamorphosing into and out of the technologies that sustain them. The political promise in this lies in the ruse of self-effacement, whereby our capacity for exceeding expectations is due precisely to our expertise in and comfort with the glittering, artifactual worlds that encompass us.

CONCLUSION

POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AS SELF-LOSS

At this point, the reader might expect me to provide some kind of conclusive summary of what political legitimacy is or ought to be, perhaps a prescription for the “problem of legitimacy,” or even an appraisal of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of one regime or another. That would be fair. After all, doesn’t the very idea of a theory of political legitimacy imply the proposition of certain standards against which to evaluate relations of command and obedience? A theory of political legitimacy might do that, but it should do more as well. A theory of political legitimacy ought to be able to represent relations of command and obedience in a way that does justice to the ways in which those for whom such relations are legitimate make sense of their world. After all, to claim that the legitimacy of governments rests on the consent of the governed (to take the most easily apprehended idea about political legitimacy in the United States today) is one thing, and to claim that consent is at all relevant to the way people make sense of their lives is something altogether different. Actually, the two claims reinforce each other. Persuasive theories of political legitimacy make claims about the formal conditions of legitimacy at the same time as they influence our view of what makes sense. For instance, Plato’s account of political justice in the *Republic* describes the socio-economic and political hierarchy of the ideal city, as well as the cosmic and psychological reality

that would make such a hierarchy meaningful to those who inhabit it. Hobbes' philosophy of sovereignty and absolute power describes a legalistic or juridical relation between subjects and the state, but it also invokes theories of nature and perception that suggest why a juridical theory of the state would be make sense to those who accept it as just. This is not just a question of discovering the internal rationality of each theory. It is rather to get inside that theory and to try to *experience* it, to imagine how it would feel to inhabit the ideal city, or the body of the Leviathan, and how that inhabitation would *make sense*. That is why I wrote in the Introduction that the title of this dissertation is not intended to promise a theory of which governments are legitimate and which are not, but instead to indicate my dissent from the view that one can make sense of power without considering what it means to be a person. My understanding of political legitimacy is that it represents a condition whereby the experience of power makes sense.

In this dissertation, I conceive of political legitimacy as an orientation towards power, and it is an orientation that is also mirrored in my approach to the texts that I discuss. That orientation could be called *conjectural*. In the fourth chapter, I wrote that conjecture, more than a way of thinking, also (at least in the Platonic context) describes the way that people evolve into their respective selves through mutual "insinuation": the question of whether conjecture is thus corruptive or not depends on the additional issue of whether or not one thinks that insinuation is a bad thing, or just a fact of life. As an orientation towards power that is as productive as it is cunning, conjecture requires that one become a bit of an interloper, that one *slip into* the sphere of contestation known as politics, that one make a habit of that sphere through frequent repetition of its manner of

being. I cannot say whether there is anything cunning about the way I read political theory, but I think that my approach to the texts also takes the form of something like a productive habituation of the regions of reality that they evoke.

Indeed, in each of the chapters of this dissertation, political legitimacy bears multiple affinities with the concept of *habit*. The region of political legitimacy, that is, coheres with those aspects of life that bring to light our demeanor or outward appearance, our character, our settled practices and customs. But with the concept of political legitimacy I have also tried to evoke an ability to be human in the ties that bind us to our habits. What that means is that our familiarity or intimacy with the conditions that impose upon us also generates our ability to vanquish adversity.

If I now appear unwilling to provide definitive answers, it is not inadvertently but rather out of respect for the complexity of the issue. I have presented political legitimacy as a heuristic device and not as a sick patient to be dissected and put back together in a healthier way. Accordingly, I have tried in each chapter to amplify the theme of self-loss in a different discursive context, but also to make each chapter follow its own line of thought, so that each one may be read more or less on its own. Let me now both briefly summarize the arguments of each of the previous five chapters and suggest what their family resemblance might be.

In the first chapter, "Political Legitimacy as Self-Loss," I open my discussion of political legitimacy by questioning the pertinence of modern rationalist or social-scientific accounts of legitimacy to the perspective of those for whom power is legitimate. I focus specifically on Max Weber's tripartite division of political legitimacy

into traditional, charismatic and rational-legal justifications of domination. What I find lacking in Weber's account, as with the social-scientific approach in general, is its inability to give those who obey an active part in the development of their own feelings for the legitimacy of their rulers. Such accounts explain little since they owe practically nothing to a grasp of the experiences that give rise to the bestowal of legitimacy—whether traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal—in the first place.

As part of my concern with the ability of rationalist discourses of power to provide an adequate depiction of the experience of legitimate power, I bring the authors of *The Federalist Papers* into the discussion. I focus on the disdain they display for affect in politics, which leads them to articulate a vision of democratic legitimacy that privileges the place of “cool” reason in the formation of public opinion. Their unreflective allusions to the protean madness of ancient Greek crowds motivates them to legitimate political order by setting it upon the column of rational deliberation. But for that reason I find them unable to provide a satisfying explanation of how anything like mutual respect or respect for government would actually be experienced among the citizens of a legitimate democratic republic.

After calling rationalist accounts of political legitimacy into question, I initiate my argument for introducing the concept of self-loss into the theorization of political legitimacy. In this section of the first chapter, I comment on John Locke's political and educational writings and Thomas Kuhn's sociological interpretation of scientific knowledge. In very different ways each one suggests why particular political or scientific regimes make sense from the perspective of those who participate in them. In a reading

of Locke that goes against the grain of a narrowly liberal appropriation of his ideas, I find an eloquent argument for questioning the foundational status of autonomy in the spheres of consent and cognition. In my interpretations of both Locke and Kuhn, the purpose is not to exclude the concept of autonomy from the concept of political legitimacy, but rather to complicate empirical or rationalist accounts of legitimacy by contextualizing autonomy within experiences of assimilation and openness to external influences.

In the second, third and fourth chapters, I throw light on the persistence of self-loss as a theme with ancient, early modern and contemporary variations in the conceptualization of identity and power. These three chapters are commentaries on, respectively, the *Republic* of Plato; four works by Thomas Hobbes: *A Short Tract on First Principles*, *Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, *De Corpore*, and *Leviathan*; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*. Through my comments on this last group, I also connect contemporary thematizations of self-loss with the characterization of self-effacement in ancient Greek philosophical, historical and mythological narratives. In an elucidation of affinities between these three periodizations in the history of political thought, I advance my argument that the experience of power can become both meaningful and conducive to self-assertion even without presupposing the autonomy or consent of political actors.

Put in the discursive context of self-loss, political legitimacy is no prophylactic against exertions of power. On the contrary, the idea of political legitimacy I present here invites us to view human beings as the sites of multiple and conflicting influences, impressions and manipulations in the realms of thought and expression. This is the main

thrust of the second chapter, on Plato: “Self-Loss in the Image of Identity.” Far from living up to his reputation as the philosopher of universal truth and unchanging reality, as the inventor of the character Socrates who speaks only for himself and nobody else even in the face of ridicule, I claim that Plato’s real achievement in the *Republic* is to unanchor the very idea of voice, and to set stubborn individuality afloat in the mutable and polymorphic sea of *mimesis*.

Through a close textual reading of the *Republic*, I highlight the language of *mimesis*, or imitation and assimilation, in Plato’s vocabulary, and demonstrate that prior to invoking unchanging truth as the foundation and mould of bodies politic and individual, Plato had first exploded the concept of a person into a mess of personalities. The philosophical citizen who speaks and acts on his or her own behalf, yet who embraces his or her society with an enthusiasm that is nothing if not religious, arises out of the fact that Plato defines the idea of a person as an essentially malleable, impressionable phantom susceptible to an erotic assimilation with the idea of singularity and philosophical self-knowledge. So while Plato’s argument for hierarchy and social control takes place against the idea of *mimesis*, against the figure of the imitative actor who has no identity of his own, *mimesis* also remains surprisingly integral to the singularity of the citizen of a just community. The just regime, in which every citizen is the proprietor of his or her own being, paradoxically depends on each citizen’s seduction by and imitation of the ideal of self-sameness.

In the third chapter, “The Phantasmic Origins of Sovereignty,” I reveal the tenacity of the Platonic idea of self-loss and *mimesis* in the context of Hobbes’ political

and natural philosophies. In this chapter, I am not only concerned to show that *mimesis* plays a part in both branches of Hobbes' thought, but also that the idea of self-loss is what unifies these elements of Hobbes' work. Moreover, even though recent commentators treat Hobbes as if he were the inventor of the narrow concept of the self that we often attribute to modern liberalism, this chapter illuminates just how profound and even mysterious is Hobbes' interpretation of the self as an artifice and an effect of power.

In the first part of the third chapter, I recast Hobbes' materialism as a philosophy of experience, whereby motion, constitutive of all matter, is immanent in sensation and imagination. What is distinctive about Hobbes' account of experience is that he evolves all the higher operations of the mind from a fundamental, though not foundational, experience of rapture that interpolates human bodies into the field of universal motion. Throughout Hobbes' works, reason, understanding and discourse are held to be the products of "phantasms" and "apparitions" by means of which the outside world is not simply known but takes possession of and sets in motion a person's internal and sensory organs. Yet it is not only the motions of the internal organs that thus fit into his elementary category of "that which has its being in another." The same goes for political bodies and the bodies of political subjects. Hobbesian political philosophy reaches a climax when Hobbes theorizes the foundation of the state as the assimilation of multiple human bodies to the singular, godlike sovereign that reconstitutes its constituents in the image of their own combined power.

In the second part of the third chapter, I argue that when Hobbes expresses the relation of subjects to states with reference to a popular sovereignty that is also an artifice, he does so against the background of Platonic *mimesis*. Contrary to the view of some of his commentators, I see Hobbes' description of the sovereign as a representation of imitation. In other words, the transfer of rights by individuals to the sovereign amounts less to an economistic exchange of power for security, as much as the institution of an artificial entity that not only mimics its creators in taking on their combined power, but that also thereby constitutes their own artificial, political identities.

In the fourth chapter, "Assertive Self-Effacements, Contemporary and Ancient," I turn to contemporary variations on the theme of self-loss and illustrate how Platonic *mimesis* continues to be built into conceptions of the self in the political theories of the twentieth century. Out of my interpretation of present-day versions of self-loss, though, I find myself drawn back to the ancient Greek world, and I reiterate the concept of *mimesis* in that context in light of its contemporary meanings. This dialectical interplay between contemporary and ancient thematizations of self-loss begins with a reading of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In my comments on that text, I draw attention to the use of mimetic metaphors in their assessment of the cultural reproduction of liberal individualism. I also read Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* as an example of the use to which *mimesis* is put in contemporary theories of identity-formation. I set Butler's text against Horkheimer and Adorno's because of what I see as her braver and more imaginative view of *mimesis* both as an instrument of socialization as well as a potential source of rebellion. That is, I construe Butler's

argument as the development of Horkheimer and Adorno's, reading her appropriation of Hegel, Foucault and Lacan as an attempt to work the dialectic of enlightenment past its own reversals, to the point when mimetic self-loss produces an unanticipated moment of self-assertion.

Inspired by Butler's account of the dialectical emergence of new forms of identity out of mimetic self-denial, I turn to ancient Greek contexts in which *mimesis* is understood as a ruse whereby self-assertion is achieved through self-effacement. I also explicate the affinities between connotations of manipulative self-denial in the Platonic characterization of *mimesis* and the explicit sense of wily and assertive self-effacement in more general usage of the term *techne*. Through readings of Plato's *Ion*, as well as Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, I explore philosophical, fictional and historical depictions of *techne*, wily and assertive self-effacement. My purpose in pointing out the connections between *mimesis* and *techne* is to redress what I see as a problem in the argument about technology in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which is that technology is to be seen only as an instrument of social control, and not as a potentially productive source of new ways of being human.

In the fifth chapter, "Technology and *Mimesis*, Political Legitimacy and Self-Loss," I bring the kinds of rapture, self-effacement and assimilation referred to under the rubric of "self-loss" within the field of political legitimacy, through an assessment of the impact of technology on the political participation and autonomy of liberal-democratic citizens. I dissent from the opinion that technology is best seen in the light of its instrumentalizing effects. Instead, I see in our multiple engagements with technology a

potentially legitimate manifestation of self-loss. Instead of fearing technology because it threatens the autonomy or integrity of individuals and thus the legitimacy of public discourse, I urge us to be at home with technology precisely for its power to multiply voices, in both individual and collective terms.

In the first section of the fifth chapter, I put the vocabularies of Platonic *mimesis* and Hobbesian phantasm to work in order to evoke a sense of the inextricable continuum that connects humans and artifacts in currents of imitation and self-loss flowing between physical, social and inner worlds. As an alternative to the thesis that technology is a creature out of control and opposed to its human creators, I present technology as quite properly bringing about changes in its creators. This I intend as a remedy to the instrumentalist discourse of technology, which I believe misrepresents the ways in which we humans are necessarily interpolated into our own artifacts for the capacity to act that they grant us.

In order to suggest that we might become dazzlingly artificial and productively self-lost in the very course of becoming immersed in the worlds of artifacts that touch us, I read Martin Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" against civic-republican political theorists of technology such as Langdon Winner. Against the civic-republican thesis that technology has become autonomous at the expense of its human creators, I call up the spirit of *mimesis* and phantasm so as to represent our immersion in technology as the fertile condition of retrieval for what is most fascinating and cunning in humans, our capacity for assertive self-effacement. Recommending that we merge with the polymorphic and artifactual worlds that surround us, I intend that we might discover

new forms of assertive self-effacement in the power that those worlds exercise through us in our habituation to them.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the Introduction, where I acknowledged that it might seem perverse to frame a theory of political legitimacy within a discourse of self-loss, and then to call the result a contribution to “liberal” political thought. Defined in opposition to an external world that threatens to invade it, the autonomous liberal self is often theorized as a circumscribed, individualized space containing the reason, liberty, and agency employed by a person in choosing his or her own ends. In this dissertation, taking assimilation and seduction as among the core characteristics of the experience of legitimate power, my theorization of legitimacy in terms of self-loss seems to invite the transgression of what Isaiah Berlin has called the “frontiers of freedom.” Offering an interpretation of Berlin’s famous essay on negative freedom, I suggested that what is really at stake in the liberal theorization of freedom is the integrity of the self: what really bothers Berlin and liberals who follow him is the risk of self-loss by *becoming* something other than oneself. More important than protecting ourselves from the state, Berlin urges the members of his audience to barricade themselves against their mutual encroachment upon each other. Lurking in the contrast between negative and positive concepts of freedom, I find the specter of a mob or *mobile vulgus* threatening to obliterate my individual uniqueness in struggles of assimilation, hypnosis, “molding,” and impersonation.

Nevertheless, I find there to be less distance between the protected frontiers of the liberal self and the principle of self-loss than a Berlinesque liberalism might suggest. In

what Thomas Dumm calls “the neutral space of negative freedom,” norms of liberal individualism are alleged to be protected from what Berlin skeptically refers to as “the certitude of higher values.” Yet I very much appreciate Dumm’s point that a theory of liberalism invoking the negative concept of freedom pulls in contradictory directions by holding the neutral space of the self to be both inviolable *and* socially constructed, arising out of rules “so long and so widely accepted” that they have “entered into the very conception of what it means to be a normal human being.” That is, at the same time as Berlin puts forth individualized and private ideals of freedom as protections against the “certitude of higher values,” his theory immerses that protected self in a certitude about normality and naturalness that legitimates individual self-expression precisely by conforming it with “what it means to be a normal human being.”

With respect to political legitimacy, what I find deficient in conceptualizing the self as a neutral space of negative freedom is that it encourages the habit of thinking about consent and autonomy as things individuals have in opposition to power. We habituate ourselves to such a view at the expense of feeling connected to the colorful, smelly and noisy—not to mention the plain, bland and quiet—world that we depend upon for the achievement of an independent and autonomous existence. My argument is for a concept of political legitimacy and political empowerment that is radically mimetic, in that it does not presuppose a distinction between nature and artifice, original and imitation, or mind and matter as normative categories of experience for political citizens. Yet even though I propose such a view of the matter in light of the deficiencies of a liberal theory of political legitimacy, mine is a conception of legitimacy that is radically,

if paradoxically, liberal. The more we recognize that there are no non-artificial frontiers of the self, the more difficult the task of providing ontological justifications for a tyranny over the body in the name of “real” or “normal” human interests. By asserting that the self has no foundation not established through its multiple and effervescent interminglings with the world of artifacts that give it shape, we actually defend individual liberty from those who would have such liberty be represented in terms of merely authentic ways of being human.

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Political Legitimacy and Self-Loss

My dissertation challenges liberal theories of political legitimacy by questioning the foundational status of autonomy in the spheres of consent and political obligation. I propose that we conceptualize political legitimacy as a condition of the mind and body in rapture, not as the accordance of power with law or principle. Nevertheless, one of my main contentions is that experiences such as assimilation, imitation, rapture, or what I call “self-loss,” are not categorically opposed to liberal conceptions of autonomy. I see such experiences as part of a continuous movement between self-loss and self-assertion that is constitutive of human identity. In the first chapter, I propose incorporating experiences of self-loss into the theorization of political legitimacy by questioning the pertinence of modern rationalist and social-scientific accounts of legitimacy to the perspective of those for whom power is legitimate. I then proceed with three chapters in which I elucidate the affinities between ancient, early modern and contemporary conceptualizations of identity and power. My main interlocutors in this respect are Plato, Thomas Hobbes, and Judith Butler. With my comments on these authors, I advance the argument that the experience of power can become both meaningful and conducive to self-assertion even without presupposing the autonomy or consent of political actors. Through further readings of Plato, as well as of Herodotus and Xenophon, I explore philosophical, fictional and historical depictions of *techne*, which I interpret as the cunning exercise of self-assertion under the guise of self-effacement. In the final chapter, I posit the idea of assertive self-loss against contemporary fears about the effects of technology on political autonomy. I argue that technology presents less of a threat to autonomy and political legitimacy, as much as a way of being human that is as artificial as it is dazzling, capable of unexpected ways of asserting itself in the very course of becoming lost in the worlds of artifice that embrace it.

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Thesmos and the Concept of Political Legitimacy in Ancient Greece

An interpretation of the Greek word for "law", *thesmos*, based on its usage in Homer, Aeschylus, and the poetry of the ancient Greek legislator Solon. *Thesmos* connotes the ambiguity of legitimate legislative power, placing the just legislator on the margins between opposing social classes, and between human and divine spheres of experience.

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